

TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR



MAGAZINE  
INDIA

₹ 150  
March 2015

# LAST MINUTE *Holidays*

## UNDISCOVERED INTERLAKEN

Plunge into a different side of everyone's favourite Swiss town: you'll leap off trees, find axe-wielding lions and explore the prettiest countryside ever

## GOA FOR EVERYONE

Crocodiles for kids? Beer for girls? Getting your hands dirty for couples, and high-pitched singing for boys: fun available in all shapes and sizes



Plus  
THE PERFECT TRIP

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ISLANDS

WINE IN THE SUN IN  
PORTUGAL

PLUS  
5 EASY  
WEEKEND TRIPS

DUBAI FOR FAMILIES

SERENE DEOGADH

A SECRET BEACH IN GOA

BUCOLIC DESERT LUXURY

PLAYING TARZAN IN MEGHALAYA



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## THE LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA PROMISE

*Lonely Planet Magazine India* provides trusted, independent travel advice and information that has been gathered without fear or favour.

We aim to provide you with options that cover a range of budgets and we reveal the positive and negative of all locations we visit.

Because we believe it is important that our journalists experience first-hand what they're writing about and because you require comprehensive information from every corner of the world, at times it may be necessary for us to seek assistance from travel providers such as tourist boards, airlines, hotels, national parks, etc. However, when receiving such assistance, we ensure our editorial integrity and independence are not compromised through the following measures:

- by publishing information on all appropriate travel suppliers and not just those who provided us with assistance
- by never promising to offer anything in return, such as positive coverage.

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### This Month's Cover



The Bernese Oberland of Switzerland is well-explored, but it still has so much to offer, especially if you're willing to step away from the fondue and get into active mode.

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



Please recycle when done with the magazine



Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor  
Follow me on Twitter: @vardhan\_lpmag

## This month...

**Vasco da Gama's gun?** Or his uncle's? Finding one of those is a distinct possibility this month, in our **Last-Minute Holidays special**. And even if you don't (Paresh Rawal probably has it somewhere), you'll find a slew of fun, sun-kissed destinations lurking in wait, like friends planning the surprise party you've known of all along.

**Switzerland**, for one, is a destination we think we know all too well, but it's always capable of throwing up a surprise. **Interlaken** is as comfortably known to Indians as a favourite pair of jeans, but there's **another side to it**: a side with screams, cows dressed for parties, and plenty of adventure, all with a view of Jungfrau, instead of the familiar one from it. Even the new (very cool, post-AIB) Karan Johar hasn't been here.

**Goa**, too, feels like something you know. But, as someone who calls the tiny state home, I'm pretty sure you don't know it this well. We've broken it down into great things for **different kinds of travellers**, so you're sure to find something you love, whether it's looking for crocodiles, go-karting, staying in some of the sweetest little hotels, or sailing off into the sunset.

Just in case Goa feels too familiar, you can try **Portugal**, where they sing sad songs and yet manage to have a wonderful time in the South European sun: with a bottle of port and a **surprisingly affordable** bill by your elbow, you'll feel right at home.

And if you really just want to get away from it all, there's always **Thailand**, with a forest of **secluded islands**, each with a score of **secluded beaches**. Find a long-tail boat, grab a beer and bubble off on glorious turquoise water.

The thing about unsurprising surprise parties is that while they might not be unexpected, they're still damned good fun.



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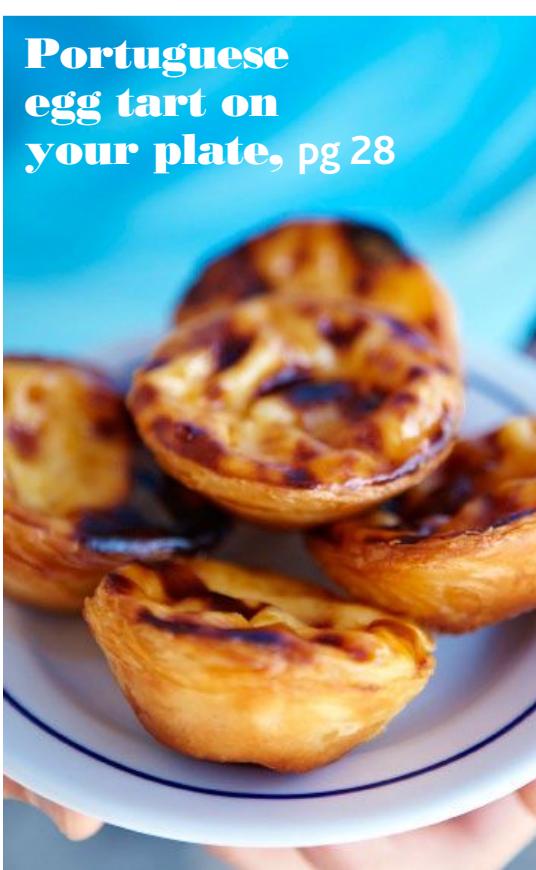


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# KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

Here's a quick guide to the sections and elements in our magazine, so you can max out your travel experience – and a menu of what's new in LPMI 2.0



## Globetrotter

The jam-packed Globetrotter section brings you closer to the world through photo features, cutaways, interviews with travel buffs, food and other tidbits, and also offers sage travel advice in the form of Q&As and news on deals and upcoming festivals. **Pg 21**

## The Photo Story

You can't really get much clearer than that name – a photographic journey that explores an interesting facet of a destination – architecture, wildlife, the great outdoors, food and drink... they all find their space here! **Pg 22**

## Country at a Glance

Country at a Glance is a bite-sized visit to a new country every issue. Discover each nation in terms of essential experiences, ways to get under its skin, words to use, trademark features as well as surprises to expect (sometimes, forewarning heightens anticipation!). **Pg 30**



## Postcards

This is your section entirely: we invite you, our readers, to send in photographs of special moments on your travels, little events or vistas that struck a chord or made you laugh. Tell us what you were doing there, and how this photograph came to be. Best of all, you don't need to be a professional photographer to be featured here. **Pg 10**

## Easy Trips

'Easy' is the operative word here. These trips are extremely simple to plan and head out on at short notice. Typically weekend trips from the larger cities in India, all our destinations are easily accessible. We also have a 'Go Now' badge: these trips are generally seasonal, and often linked to upcoming festivals or events. **Pg 37**

## Features

These are our longer, more elaborate stories, which get under the skin of a place. Each feature has a Make It Happen section; a practical guide with all the information you need to plan out this trip. This includes, where possible, the ideal, step-by-step itinerary to best enjoy a destination: take it to your agent, and off you go! **Pg 59**

## Mini Guides

A hugely practical set of guides to cities or regions for you to tear out, fold and keep in your bag. Each Mini Guide contains a detailed map, hotel and restaurant listings, a slice of things to do and see, plus other useful info (Indian embassies abroad, currency, vegetarian-friendly restaurants, etc). **Pg 117**

# KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

## MINI GUIDE

Family fun in Paris, France

### Getting around

### Eat & drink

One tiny cup of thick, rich, velvety hot chocolate isn't enough for anyone, and at **Couquelicot** (1), it doesn't feel like it either. Here, the cutie little café serves the classic French way of drinking hot chocolate—because sometimes, good things don't just come in small packages. (00-33-1-4606-1877, 24, Rue des Abbesses, *couquelicot-montmartre.com*.)

Bam - 5.30pm Tues - Fri, 6.30pm Sat - Sun breakfast from ₹350.

Meatloving fans will rejoice! The iconic **Le Relais de l'Entrecôte** (2) serves one meal only—steak and frites with the house sauce—but with such deliciousness, it's hard to fault it. It is regarded as one of the best of its kind in the world (00-33-1-4633-8282; *relaisdeleentreote.fr*).

Tours 12pm - 2pm & 5pm - 10pm Tues - Sat; from ₹800.)

### Visa

Apply for a short-stay Schengen visa valid for tourism and business (₹ 4,200), as of January 1, 2015, Indian tourists will be issued visas within 48 hours of application ([ambassade-india.fr](http://ambassade-india.fr)).

### Embassy Alert

Embassy of India, Paris:

[amb-india.fr](http://amb-india.fr)

Make sure you sink your teeth into crepes while in Paris

### Sleep

Surprisingly affordable, **Hotel Residence Foch** (3) is a pastel haven located a short drive from the Eiffel Tower, another Parisian landmark. The family-run hotel is spacious and sensible bet for your stay in the city (00-33-1-4500-4650; *foch-paris-hotel.com*).

Rue Marbeau; from ₹8,725; [foch-paris-hotel.com](http://foch-paris-hotel.com).)

Eat on the pocket by Parisian standards and a store's throw from the Eiffel Tower, the charming **Hotel du Château de Marly** (4)

is a budget option with colours that are a traveller's favourite (00-33-1-4551-5230; *hotelduchateau.com*).

*Rue du Champ de Mars; from ₹1,200.*

Paris is Paris is an apartment rental website with options to suit different budgets and family sizes. From the site, two-bedroom **Le Bel Epoque** (5)

is a 10-minute walk from the Cité de la Mode et du Design.

It's a Nord station, and perfect for families of four or more (00-33-1-4492-0084; *perfectlyparis.com*).

*Rue de Chabrol; 12pm - 1.30pm, 7pm - 11pm; mains from ₹500).*

**Fancy a Curry?** *Kashmir House* gets rave reviews for its authentic food and attentive staff. Try the tandoori chicken or mutton biryani (00-33-1-4022-0008; *www.kashmirhouse.com*).

*36, Rue de Chabrol; 12pm - 1.30pm, 7pm - 11pm; mains from ₹500).*

**Veg Out** The all-organic, **Café Pissen**

(6) is famed for its menu and cosy ambience (00-33-1-8882-5353; *cafepissen.fr*).

*69, Rue du Forêt (3rd Arrondissement); from ₹800.*

*For more details, log on to [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com).*

**Essentials**

**GETTING THERE**

Jet Airways, Qatar Airways, Emirates, Air France, Etihad Airways, and Air India fly to Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport from major Indian cities (return fares from ₹3,500).

**THE COST**

LOW HIGH

**DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL**

LOW HIGH

**WHEN TO GO**

LOW HIGH

**6**

**GETTING AROUND**

LOW HIGH

**6**

**Essentials**

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# Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN





Dades Gorge lies some 320km east of Marrakesh – the area is known for its Berber *kasbahs*, crag-top villages and unusual rock formations

**DADÈS GORGE,  
MOROCCO**

## Along a winding road

I was lucky enough to spend a month travelling around southern Morocco. Before this particular adventure, I had made a short trip to the Rose Festival held annually in the town of El-Kelaâ M'Gouna in May, and had decided to return to the country and spend more time experiencing the culture and amazing landscapes of the south. This photo was taken from the top of the mountain pass in the Dadès Gorge, between the Atlas mountains and Anti-Atlas mountains. After the trek to the top, it was incredible to see the vehicles tackling the road. The panoramic views, the colour of the earth and the warmth of the local Berber people made this trip an unforgettable experience.



**Katy Stamp** is from the UK and enjoyed her time in Morocco.



Why not get involved? We'd love to include your best new travel photos (at 300dpi) and the inspiring stories behind them. Send them with a pic of yourself to [lpmagazine@wwm.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@wwm.co.in)



The direwolves in *Game of Thrones* are inspired by the grey wolves of Europe

## HAJNÓWKA, POLAND

### Cry wolf

On a recent visit to Bialowieza National Park on the border of Poland and Belarus, we were walking a nature trail with a guide, looking for European bison and wolves. We had no luck, though, and we didn't spot anything that evening, except a dog. I pointed it out to the guide to ask him what the dog was doing in the forest, when I realised it was actually a wolf. He turned to look at us and that's when I managed to capture this photograph.



**Randeep Singh** is an industrialist who travels extensively to photograph wildlife

## HANOI, VIETNAM

### Check mate

The temple of the Jade Mountain, Ngoc Son, is located on an island in the Hoan Kiem Lake in the Thang Long region of Hanoi. It is a few centuries old and has seen many a change of faith and guard. Approached by a red wooden bridge, it houses relics pertaining to the principles of Feng Shui and Taoism. These two gentlemen, squatting on a platform in the temple complex and engrossed in the game of *xiangqi* (Chinese chess), made me pause for this picture.



**Sunil Jain** is a practicing paediatrician and travel photography enthusiast



Hanoi's official name 'Thang Long' means 'ascending dragon', but Hanoi means 'city inside rivers'



The best time to embark on the Chadar Trek is from mid-January to mid-February, when the ice is at its thickest

**LADAKH,  
JAMMU & KASHMIR  
Ice fever**

Every winter, the Zanskar River freezes over, and people from all over the world come to walk on the ice. With temperatures at about -20°C, this is not a trek for the faint-hearted. The sights are awe-inspiring – the Himalayas seem fragile in their stark beauty. Unfortunately, this freezing-over will not last long, as the river is falling prey to global warming. Another reality is that a road is being built along the Zanskar, which will make the valley motorable but relegate the trek into history.



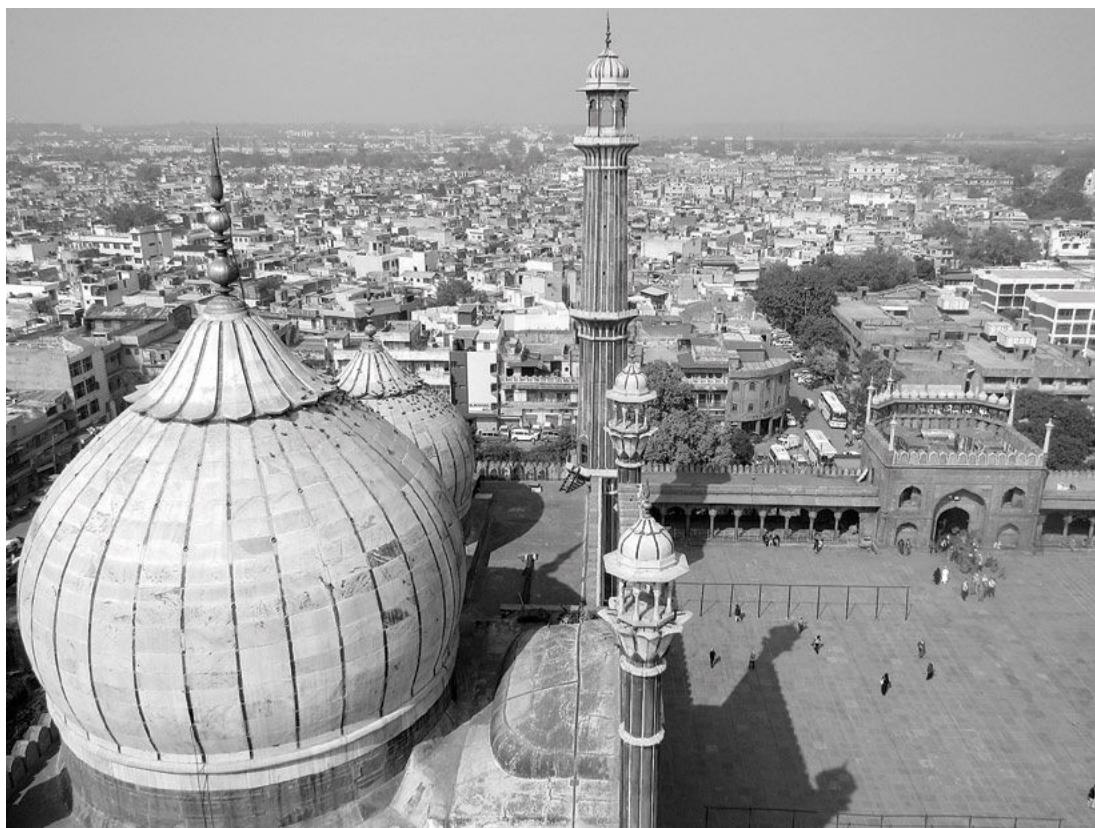
**Kumar Mangwani** is a photographer who has travelled extensively across India.

**DELHI, NCR****In line**

I took this photo from one of the minarets flanking the Jama Masjid. Away from worshippers in the mosque courtyard, for a nominal fee, visitors can climb a 130-step staircase to get a contrasting, 360° view of the old and urban parts the city. The area at the top can hold a small group, and we had the good fortune of being the only visitors. You can see the perimeter of the Red Fort, and Edward Lutyens's aligning of Connaught Place and Parliament House with the Jama Masjid.



**Shashendra Singh Chauhan** likes exploring new destinations at a slow pace.



Delhi's Jama Masjid is the largest in India. The courtyard can hold up to 25,000 devotees



The Balinese calendar has only 210 days

**SKAGIT VALLEY, USA****Flutter by**

While on vacation in April 2013, we happened to visit a tulip festival in the Skagit Valley, north of Seattle. It was an overwhelming sight that saturated our eyes with the rich, vivid colours of a wide variety of tulips that seemed to carpet thousands of acres.

In one of those beautiful tulip gardens, we came upon these dainty butterflies dancing amid the flowers. I couldn't help but capture this heart-warming sight.



**Dr Peeyush Halkare** is a practising dental surgeon from Pune. He's a travel enthusiast who likes to experience different cultures.



Almost 4,00,000 people descend upon Skagit Valley every year for the springtime Tulip Festival

**BALI, INDONESIA****Ring of fire**

While all trips to Bali are all about tranquillity and beaches, the religious undertones are unmissable. One of the great expressions of this sentiment is the *kecak* dance, which depicts events from the *Ramayana*. The dance I saw comprised 50 bare-chested men providing the background tones to the dancers while chanting 'cak' (hence the name). This picture depicts Hanuman setting Lanka on fire. It is because of this that the dance is also known as the 'Fire Dance'.



**Piyush Kharbanda** is a private equity investor working with a leading India-based fund.



With paintings by British and Indian greats, the NGMA New Delhi was once the home of the Maharajas of Jaipur

**SRI LANKA****Over the hill**

The drive from Colombo's airport to Nuwara Eliya is an apt introduction to Sri Lanka – it's a great road (at least for someone more used to road-tripping across India), very picturesque, especially once we passed Kandy and started heading up into the hills. They were a lush green, dotted with waterfalls, and punctuated by thick forests. I took this photograph just as the sun was rising over one of the many perfectly-manicured tea estates, which spread as far as the eye could see.



**Kunal Gupta** is a marketing professional with a passion for travel.



Part of Sri Lanka's 'high country', Nuwara Eliya has been a preferred vacation spot since colonial times for its tea and cool climes

**NEW DELHI, NCR****Magic in the mundane**

I have learnt to find the time to stop and stare, lest I miss the little joys to be found in everyday life. There is a trove of surprises, of routine things that have the power to transform into the magical – provided you have the time to give them a second glance. I took this photograph of an exhibit at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi, which speaks volumes to me. The artist has transformed regular kitchen utensils into a piece of art.



Botanist **Dr Deepthi Singh Gupta** is a travel enthusiast and avid blogger.



Both male and female walruses sport tusks, the size of which determines their social standing

## IN THE NORWEGIAN ARCTIC

### Wall-e

I went on a photo expedition in the Norwegian Arctic last September, reaching 80° N. Almost every day, we would take Zodiacs on excursions. One such trip had us visiting a walrus-hauling site. We were watching from the water's edge when, in ones and twos, they started approaching us, coming within 10ft of us. Wide-angle shots of megafauna taken from close by lends itself to a different type of wildlife photography – the ability to provide an 'as the eyes saw it' feel.



**Amartya Mukherjee** is a regular contributor to the Postcards section.

## MADGAON, GOA

### Old yeller

Historically, Goan architecture has strong Mughal, Indian and Portuguese influences, and some houses that still stand today were built between the 18th and early 20th centuries. I have always been mesmerised by Goa's old architecture, and I think that windows were more decorative, ornate and expressive at that time. The last time I was there, I made it a point to tour old Goan houses. I went across to Chandor, Madgaon and Candolim to capture the colourful structures and windows.



**Sohil Laad** loves photography because it allows him to capture moments forever.



Portuguese-style bungalows with their typical *balcões* (porches) and *saquãos* (courtyards) stand out in Goa's cities

## POSTCARDS



Why not get involved? We'd love to include your best new travel photos (at 300dpi) and the inspiring stories behind them. Send them with a pic of yourself to [lpmagazine@wwm.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@wwm.co.in)



Polski Fiats, built under the licence of the Italian manufacturer, were among the most popular cars in communist Poland

### BRECON BEACONS, WALES

#### A fleecing moment

We had just walked up the peaks of Pen y Fan and Corn Du, and taken lots of pictures of the views from the top. As we were walking back to our hostel a short distance away, we surprised a lamb, who kindly posed for a quick photo before bounding off. Needless to say, compared to all the carefully-composed photos I took that day, this unexpected one is by far my favourite.



**Emma Hawkins** is a teacher and visited the Brecon Beacons National Park for a few days.



There are an estimated 8.9 million sheep in Wales, which amounts to roughly three for every person in the country

### KRAKÓW, POLAND

#### Wheely colourful

I spent three days in Kraków with my boyfriend, celebrating my birthday. On our second day, we walked to the old Jewish quarter, the Kazimierz District, and wandered around all morning, following a walk in our *Lonely Planet* guidebook. We were walking down a street when we noticed this old Fiat. We were struck by its colours, which stood out in contrast to the rather rainy, dull day. I waited until I had a clear view and took a few photos.



**Sarah Farquhar** had always wanted to visit Poland since studying the holocaust at university.

# Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



**SHANGHAI, CHINA**

## Serenity on The Bund

**What worked:** The largest Chinese city in terms of population, Shanghai is a multi-cultural city with numerous attractions. There's the Shanghai Museum, the Oriental Pearl Tower, the Jade Buddha Temple and Nanjing Road (for shopaholics), but it was The Bund that I fell in love with. A serene, long road running alongside the river, with about 29 architectural delights on both sides of the water, make this one of the most incredible riverfront areas in the world. Wandering about this place at night is even more blissful, with the colourful lights from the stunning buildings on either side of the river reflected in the water. You can spend an entire evening by the waterfront, photographing the beautiful structures, walking around and just enjoying the cool air. You can even take a breezy river cruise for a different perspective of the area.

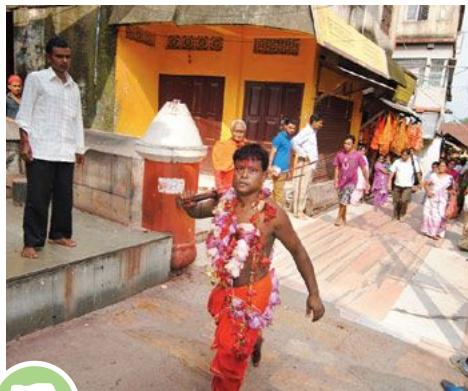
**What didn't:** Check the weather conditions before visiting The Bund, as heavy fog can affect your experience.

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

Winters in Shanghai tend to be very cold. The best time to visit the city is during spring (March–May) when it's warm enough to enjoy the outdoors and do the river cruise.



**Jhilmil Bhansali Jain** from New Delhi recommends a night-time visit to The Bund in Shanghai



## KAMAKHYA TEMPLE, GUWAHATI Rites go wrong

**What worked:** Kamakhya Temple commemorates the Hindu Goddess Sati or Kamakhya Devi. It's believed that Muslim invaders attacked it in 1665, but the results of reconstruction, which has brought back some of its former glory, are visible today. The devotion here is palpable. I saw many *sadhus* walking up the stairs in a trance to offer prayers in the sanctum sanctorum.

**What didn't:** Animal sacrifices are offered at this temple – I even saw goats being prepared for the kill. There were poor pigeons being released for ₹ 100 each after being cruelly held in chained, wicker baskets, only to be captured again, tortured once more in the tiny baskets, with no space between them to move, and released for the same consideration... the cycle went on and on. An agnostic willing to change at this temple so revered, I was revolted by these merciless rituals.

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

A taxi from Guwahati will get you to the foothills of Nilanchal Hill (about 7km), atop which the temple is perched.



**Mohan Rajan** from Mumbai recently visited this Hindu shrine near Guwahati

## This page belongs To YOU

**WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS  
IN TWO CATEGORIES**

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

### Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

**PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW  
OR SUGGEST**

**Mail in your reviews and suggestions to [lpmagazine@wwm.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@wwm.co.in)**

# Letters

Here are your reactions and responses to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*: thank you!

Letter  
of the  
month



and Pieter's brave journey across 16 countries, I succeeded in convincing my father that I could surely ride on New Delhi's roads. Thank you for helping me make the impossible possible.

– B Ajit, New Delhi



## Travel inspiration

This is my first letter to your magazine. I'm like any other teenager, juggling between mock CET and JEE test; my whole day is spent preparing for exams. Team LPMI

is a bunch of enthusiastic people doing what excites them and you show people like me that life is so much more than a rat race. You make the world a smaller place by bringing destinations, filled with unique traditions and lifestyles, which are spread across the globe closer to us. This inspires me to excel at my exams and be successful so that I can make enough money to travel the world. You give wings to the travel bug in people and the credit goes not just to your columns or stories but also to you all – the people at *Lonely Planet Magazine India*. Hearty congratulations on your fifth anniversary and I'm sure there'll be 50 more to come.

– Monisha Murthy, Bangalore

## Going digital

I recently succumbed to temptation and bought the Apple iPad Air. However, I soon realised that it wasn't of much use to me, as it neither replaced my laptop nor my smartphone. I thought it was just another dead investment, until I found out about the magazine's digital version. Now my daily boring ride on the Metro has become a pleasurable one as I've bought the e-magazine. The crowds don't bother me anymore as I'm glued to the iPad, reading stunning features on Trinidad and Tobago,

## Riders on the storm

The February 2015 issue of *Lonely Planet Magazine India* managed to convince my father to do what my umpteen requests and tantrums failed to do – buy me a high-end bike. He was against the idea of me riding a bike in New Delhi owing to the heavy, undisciplined traffic. But when I showed him the beautiful coverage in the feature *Go Your Own Way*, he was mesmerised. After reading about Mandy

and Pieter's brave journey across 16 countries, I succeeded in convincing my father that I could surely ride on New Delhi's roads. Thank you for helping me make the impossible possible.

– B Ajit, New Delhi

Chicago and Manipur (LPMI February 2015).

– Anju Khetarpal, Ghaziabad

## Travel rediscovered

Now that I subscribe to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, I've realised that I feel a void within two to three days of finishing reading the issue. I am also envious of all the contributors who send breathtaking photographs for the Postcards section. In fact, I've now started investing in some more mutual funds so that I can save for future travels. Although I've travelled through most of India during my childhood, I think I now need to revisit those destinations to capture them through CinemaScope lenses. Keep enriching our travels with knowledge and colour.

– Twishampati Banerjee, Hyderabad

## JAZZ BAG, MANHATTAN PHONE COVER WITHOUT CHAIN, L WALLET

Engineered from soft, genuine Cow Banjo leather, the uber-smart Manhattan Collection from Viari is a must-have for the metrosexual man on the move. The Jazz Bag, with its exterior pocket and well-organised interiors, fits your tablet or iPad Mini and more. The Manhattan Phone Cover, without chain, uses a magnetic closure to keep your mobile safe, while the stylish L Wallet is designed to store your cash neatly. For more details on the Manhattan collection, log on to [viari.in](http://viari.in)

The writer of this issue's *Letter of the Month* wins this Viari Jazz Bag, Manhattan Phone Cover without chain and L Wallet in tan. To write in to the magazine, email us at [lpmagazine@wwm.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@wwm.co.in)



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(Joji Varghese)  
Signature of the Publisher

Date: March 1, 2015  
Place: Mumbai

AND FOR THAT  
ONE MOMENT  
YOU ARE ONE WITH  
THE UNIVERSE.



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lonely planet  
MAGAZINE  
INDIA

# Globetrotter

A WORLD OF TRAVEL NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

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**PG 22** The Photo Story: There's a puffin or a blackening a-waiting on the **Orkney Islands** in Scotland

**PG 28** World on your Plate: A rich custard tart, the **pastel de nata** from **Portugal** is enjoying sweet success across the world

**PG 29** Travel Icon: Get up close and personal with a **Spanish flamenco dancer**

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Orkney, in The Photo Story (pg 22), is known for its wildlife. You'll see puffins in Papa Westray and in Westray where they come to breed between May and early August





'Blackening' is one of Orkney's unique pre-wedding traditions. The friends of the groom or bride hijack the soon-to-be-wed person, and bind them to a post, here in front of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, tarring them with a mixture of flour, paste and feathers. They are then paraded about on the back of a truck, accompanied by drumming and bugling to catch everyone's attention

## The Photo Story

BHASKR DK



## Into Orkney

I'm not a celebrity, nor a head of state. I don't work at anything that qualifies me to be treated like a VIP. Yet, in Orkney, I was treated like one. When I checked in at the boutique Holland House B&B, the owners unfurled the Indian flag in honour of my stay. I will never forget how proud I felt standing beneath the fluttering flag and listening to our national anthem. That touching gesture symbolises the true hospitality of Orkney.

Orkney is a collection of about 70 islands in Northern Scotland, 20 of which are inhabited, with **Mainland** being the largest. Its landscape is influenced by its endless horizons, the sea, and the ever-changing sky above. Its birds, moorlands, heaths, marshes, lochs and coasts form a rich tapestry against which Orcadians, descended from Picts, Norsemen and Scots, sustain themselves by fishing and farming.

Rain is a constant, but, when the sun comes out, it lights up the Neolithic stones and architecture that collectively form the **Heart of Neolithic Orkney**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The dramatic **Ring of Brodgar**, a near-perfect circle of stones near Stromness on Mainland, is believed to have been the site of ceremonies and rituals that involved the sun, the moon and the earth. Beneath a grassy mound covered by yellow buttercups lies **Maes Howe**, also on Mainland, going back over 4,000 years; the chamber is believed to have been a community meeting place and shelter. In 1850, a severe storm unearthed **Skara Brae** on the Bay of Skaill on Mainland's west coast. The 10 houses in the village are 5,000 years old and reveal remnants of cupboards, bedsteads and hearths, all built from local sandstone.

There are also modern attractions – nightclubs, cabaret shows, bistros and cafés in and around the capital, the port city of **Kirkwall**. In a week-long sojourn, I drove on the same side as we do in India, explored the farthest corners of the archipelago, had puffins encircle me in the wee hours of the morning, saw the moon rise across the pristine Orcadian landscape, and shopped for exquisite pottery, jewellery and textiles. I was privileged to participate in the unique Orcadian tradition of 'blackening'. I experienced the warmth and hospitality of the islanders. One thing hasn't changed down the ages in Orkney: people still don't lock their homes when they go out.→

---

Photo-journalist **Bhaskar DK** has travelled extensively across the world. He enjoys living with locals for long periods of time, looking to capture the spirit of the destination in images and experiences.



The lanes and bylanes of the capital city of Kirkwall offer a largely chain store-free shopping experience. Each shop is unique, offering designer jewellery, eclectic clothing, pottery, musical instruments and art



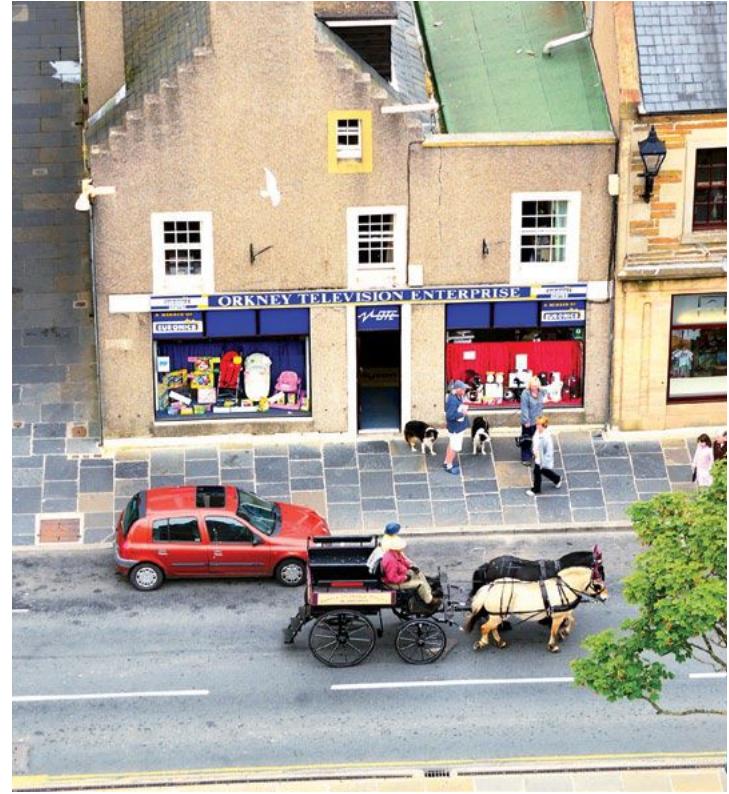
The Romanesque St Magnus Cathedral was built around the 12th century. The stained glass windows were subsequently changed in the 20th century



The island community is involved in many arts and crafts, including weaving and knitwear in both traditional and contemporary styles



A young schoolgirl participates in a parade in front of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall



Kirkwall is a walking-friendly town, but a ride in a carriage through the town's medieval alleys offers interesting stopovers. The carriages are driven by local farmers, each a fount of intimate knowledge about the islands



Thanks to its harbour, Kirkwall has been a sought-after European destination. Today, in addition to the 70 odd ships that pull in annually, Kirkwall is also a terminal for many of the ferries to the islands →



Separated from the mainland, the Old Man of Hoy is a stack of red sandstone standing 137m high on a plinth of basalt rock



Located by Bay of Skaill's white beach, Skara Brae is a stone-built Neolithic settlement. The site was covered with sand dunes until it was accidentally rediscovered in 1850



It is believed that the original occupants of Skara Brae lived as a community of 50 to 100 villagers skilled in working with bones and stones. Walls were built with sandstone slabs and houses topped with thatched roofs. All the dwellings were laid out identically, with a fireplace, two beds, dressers and storage units →



This bone, from the remains of a beached whale, on the coastal path to Brough of Brishay, has withstood the harsh Orkney weather for over 150 years



Orkney's potters turn out exquisite wares influenced by the scenery and colours around the island



Since the days of Celtic settlement in the Stone Age, the Orkney Islands have been a living museum of ancient cultures and architecture in stone. Many of the low-lying islands are treeless and feature scenic rolling greens and heather-carpetted hills dotted with cattle and sheep ☺

# Pastel de nata

Portugal

Many countries enjoy some variation of flaky pastry filled with a cooked mix of egg yolks, milk and sugar – think of the French flan *pâtissier* and Britain's faithful custard tart. But in recent years, the Portuguese version has become a global favourite. The *pastel de nata* (*pastéis* in the plural) is distinguished by its richly-sweet filling, often flavoured with vanilla, lemon or cinnamon, which develops a semi-browned, undulating glaze on top when it goes in the oven.

## ORIGINS

The first recipe for the tarts seems to have come from the Jerónimos Monastery in Belém, four miles west of central Lisbon. Monks and nuns needed egg whites to starch their clothes and selling custard tarts was a good way of using up the leftover yolks.



## CRISIS

When monasteries across Portugal were closed in the liberal movement of the 1820s and '30s, the monks sold the recipe to a nearby sugar refinery. Since 1837, the Antiga Confeitaria de Belém has been the only place where you can buy genuine *pastéis de Belém* – it makes up to 20,000 tarts a day.

## MAKES: 12 TARTS

- \* 5 tbsp granulated sugar
- \* 5 egg yolks
- \* 250ml single cream
- \* 400g puff pastry dough\*
- \* vanilla essence (optional)

1. Make the custard filling by combining the sugar, egg yolks and cream, and heating the mixture in a *bain-marie*. Keep stirring as the water boils until the mix thickens to a custard consistency. Allow the custard to cool down while you prepare the pastry.

2. Cut the dough into 12 equal pieces about 1½cm thick.  
3. Take a greased muffin tray and massage the dough evenly into each hollow to shape the pieces into cups.  
4. Pour the cooled custard (mixed with a few drops of vanilla essence if using) into each cup.

5. Bake in a pre-heated oven at 290°C (or as high as it will go below that) for about 15 minutes until the pastry is golden and the custard turns dark brown in patches.  
6. Enjoy hot or cold.

\*If you want to make your own dough, check the online tutorial at [bbcgoodfood.com/technique/how-make-puff-pastry](http://bbcgoodfood.com/technique/how-make-puff-pastry).

## INTO ASIA

In the 20th century, the twin colonial outposts of Macau and Hong Kong both came to love competing versions of the custard tart, Portuguese-style or British-inspired. Now that both enclaves have returned to China, it looks like the Macanese-Portuguese version has the edge in the race to win over the world's most populous nation.

# Flamenco dancer

Flamenco's journey to become the quintessential Spanish dance style had a slow build-up and then a dramatic surge of energy. The art is closely linked with *gitano* (Romani) people, originally from India, who arrived in Spain in medieval times. Their musical traditions mixed with those of the Moors and Jews in the southern region of Andalucía. What began as a hidden way for people on the margins of society to express their joys and frustrations became a passion across Spain after the 1860s.



## HANDIWORK

Watch the hands: they play a big part in flamenco, often making a *floreo* – a flowery movement that can look a bit like twisting an orange off a branch. While castanets have a long association with Spanish dance, they are not used in most forms of flamenco, with rhythmic finger-snaps (*pitos*) taking their place.

Most visitors to Spain who go to see flamenco being performed do so at a *tablao* – a club that puts on a dedicated show. Many verge on the kitsch, but there are some that are true to the spirit of flamenco, such as the Casa de la Memoria de Al-Andalus in Seville ([casadelamemoria.es](http://casadelamemoria.es)).



## THE SOUL OF THE DANCE

Flamenco, as seen in the effect it can have on an audience, is a great example of *duende* – said to be the hardest word to translate from Spanish. *Duende* combines sudden inspiration, magnetism, heightened emotion and 'dark sounds', in the words of Spain's great poet Lorca in 1933.

## SHOUT IT OUT

Song, dance and musical accompaniment (typically on guitar) are the main elements of flamenco, but the fourth is *jaleo* – the range of cries and sounds used to encourage a flamenco performer, made by fellow artistes or aficionados in the audience. Their origins may lie in Hebrew or Arabic chants. '*¡Olé!*' is the most famous, but other common shouts include '*¡Vamos ya!*' ('Let's go!') and '*Agua*' ('It's so hot I need water').

## GOWNS OF RENOWN

Flamenco dresses are typically ankle-length, with ruffles to enhance the foot movements (including the *golpe* – stamp). Contrary to the popular image, polka-dot dresses are more usual for the partly-related *sevillanas* dance style than in pure flamenco.

## Country at a Glance



## Laos

**L**ANDLOCKED between Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, China and Cambodia, Laos is a sleepy Buddhist backwater whose friendly inhabitants and laid-back way of life are its biggest visitor attractions. Here, the currents of Asia swirl like the murky waters of the Mekong River – markets are piled high with durians, statues of Buddha look out over paddy fields, and monks in saffron robes carry umbrellas to

drive back the tropical sun and monsoon rain. Outside of the pocket-sized capital, Vientiane, travellers trek to tribal villages, or spend lazy days sipping Lao Beer in the sleepy Colonial city of Luang Prabang.



## TOP THINGS TO SEE

- \* The angular, golden spires of the Pha That Luang stupa in **Vientiane**
- \* One monk's version of heaven and hell in the sculpture garden at **Xieng Khuan**
- \* Irrawaddy dolphins splashing around the 4,000 river islands at **Si Phan Don**
- \* Royal relics and ancient monasteries in World Heritage-listed **Luang Prabang**
- \* Dramatic limestone caverns at **Vieng Xai** and **Vang Vieng**

## TOP THINGS TO DO

- \* Drop into a **Lao wat** (Buddhist temple-monastery) for a chat with the novices.

\* Drift along the **Nam Song River** on an old inner tube at Vang Vieng (this is dangerous, however, if you're not sober).

- \* Trek to tribal villages in the **Nam Ha National Protected Area**.
- \* Take a slow boat along the **Mekong** from Luang Prabang to Nong Khiau.
- \* Eat a Lao lunch of barbecued pork and sticky rice overlooking Mekong River.

## GETTING UNDER THE SKIN

**Read** Brett Dakin's *Another Quiet American* or Dervla Murphy's *One Foot in Laos* for a personal take on the Lao PDR (People's Democratic Republic).

**Capital:**  
**Vientiane**

**Population:**  
**6,834,942**

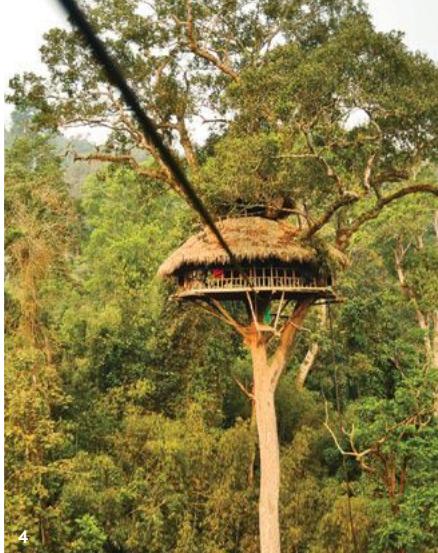
**Area:** **2,36,800sqkm**

**Official language:**  
**Lao**

TRADEMARKS  
Angular stupas; monks with umbrellas;  
monsoon rains and rice paddy fields;  
dragon-boat races along the Mekong River;  
rubber rings; unexploded ordnance (UXO)

BEST TIME TO VISIT  
November to February,  
to avoid the worst  
of the humidity

RANDOM FACT  
Laos has the unenviable status of being  
the most-bombed nation in the world –  
there are estimated to be 270 million  
unexploded bombs in the country.



**Listen** to the undulating melodies of the *khene* (the traditional reed pipe of the Lao tribes).  
**Watch** *Good Morning, Luang Prabang*, the first-ever privately-funded Lao movie.  
**Eat** *laap* (spicy, marinated meat) or *tam maak hung* (green papaya salad).  
**Drink** *lao-lao* (rice liquor) or Lao Beer, the nation's favourite brew.



**IN A WORD**  
*Sukwan!*  
**(The calling of the soul)**

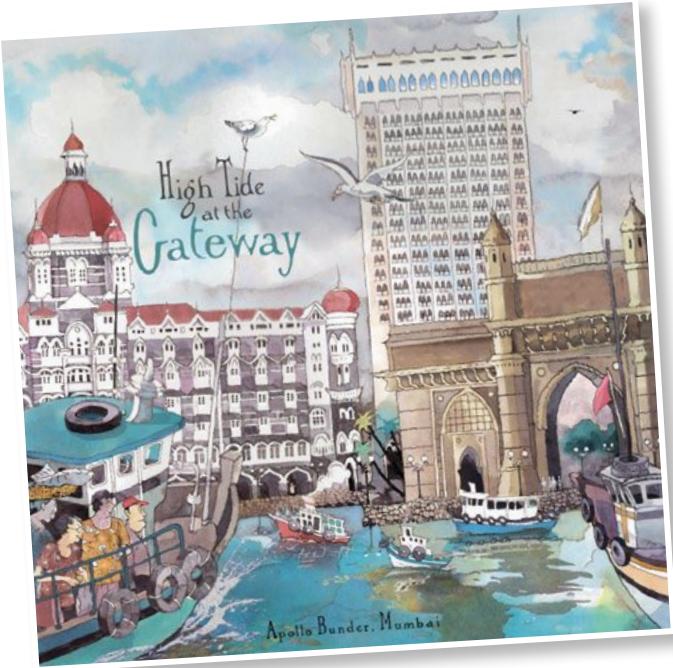
1. Monks are a common sight in Laos
2. Rice farming is a major Lao occupation
3. The local market is the place for fresh produce and charismatic sellers
4. The forests of Laos shelter gibbons and offer other interesting experiences as well
5. The reclining Buddha at Vientiane
6. The *khene* is the traditional tribal reed pipe

# Arrivals

## New Place

### NO APAULOGYS HERE!

It takes a bit of getting to, but then, why would a treasure trove be easy to find? We looked high and low off Mumbai's busy E Moses Road in Worli till we came upon **APAULOGY** – and it was well worth the search. We first met **Paul Fernandes** and his Gallery of Curious Memories for our Bangalore story (*The Garden's Secrets*, LPMI Nov 2014), and we're thrilled to find him now giving vintage Bombay his attention! On offer are Paul's gorgeous illustrations on prints, posters, plaques, bags, magnets, mugs, bookmarks and coasters, as well as quirky memorabilia that will take you back to less-complicated and happier times. *aPaulogy Mumbai: 00-91-9821097907; facebook.com/aPaulogyMumbai; 2B, Mohatta Bhavan, off Dr E Moses Rd (in the lane between the Toyota and Furniturewalla showrooms), Worli, Mumbai; 11am–7pm; from ₹200*



## 5 Minutes with Zorawar Kalra

Restaurateur and entrepreneur



**I travel only for food.** Don't tell my wife that; she thinks I take her to exotic places on a whim! I pick my destinations around restaurants in that part of the world. One of my greatest travel and food experiences was at elBulli, a three Michelin-starred restaurant (now closed) in Catalonia, Spain, which was among the most exclusive and experimental restaurants in the world, specialising in haute cuisine and molecular gastronomy. It was notoriously hard to get a reservation; the restaurant was open just six months a year, but it got over a million reservation requests. The fare was transcendental; it changed the way I approached food forever.

**Growing up**, as the son of Jiggs Kalra, one of the country's premier food writers and critics, food was always the topic of conversation in our house.

**We had a tradition** of going on a family vacation together every year. We travelled the whole world, ate at the poshest restaurants and the

smallest B&Bs and abbeys, sampling local and international food. I couldn't help but develop a strong palate and understanding of food.

**One of my most memorable trips was when I was 15.** We went on a road trip through Wales and Scotland and I had the most amazing gourmet, organic local food like a confit made from rabbit that had been caught an hour earlier.

**I always pick up menus and customised matchboxes** from the restaurants I eat at when I travel.

**New Delhi has a great restaurant scene**, but, for an authentic experience, I travel to Old Delhi for four things – *puri bhaji*, *chole bhatura*, *jalebi* and, close to Jama Masjid, *nalli nihari*. Eaten first thing on a cold morning, that *nihari*, soaked up with *khameeri roti*, is one of the greatest experiences a food lover can have.

AS TOLD TO DEEPTI UNNI

## Catch a tee party in Ireland

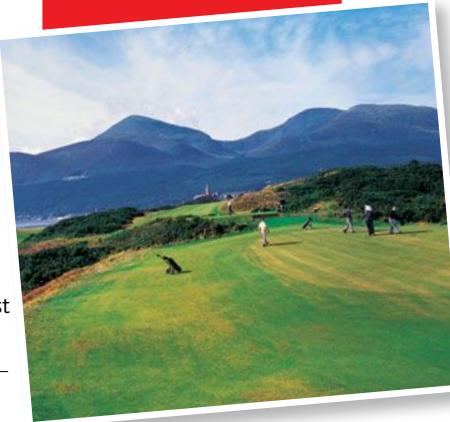
The European Tour returns to Northern Ireland in May for the **2015 Irish Open**, and, for the first time in 76 years, the golf tournament

will be hosted at the famous **Royal County Down Links**.

Which means, if you can tear your eyes away from the likes of current world number one Rory McIlroy and favourite Darren Clarke teeing off, you will notice that the course is set against the magnificent Mountains of Mourne, that it stretches along the shores of Dundrum Bay, and that the views all around are uniformly brilliant. But look back at the green, too: the ninth hole is said to be the most photographed in the world.

WIN  
A TRIP TO  
IRELAND!

*Tourism Ireland is offering a lucky winner the chance to bag a trip for two to watch the Irish Open 2015. To participate, visit [www.ireland.com](http://www.ireland.com). Last date for entries: Mar 31, 2015.*



**SAVE TODAY, TRAVEL TOMORROW**

You know that dream holiday you've been wanting to take forever but don't really have the money for? **THOMAS COOK INDIA** will not only help you plan it, but also help you save for it. In association with **IndusInd Bank**, the travel services company has launched the **Holiday Savings Account**. With this account, you can save for your holiday in 12 monthly installments, earn interest of upto 9.1 per cent per annum, and the 13th installment will be paid by Thomas Cook India. Also, you can travel to your favoured destination next year at today's prices, enjoying savings of more than 20 per cent. Three easy steps to bring you one step closer to that Arctic expedition or African safari! ([thomascook.in](http://thomascook.in))



## EAT LATIN AMERICA IN MUMBAI

We're hearing good things about Mumbai's new Latin American grill restaurant. People who know food say that **ASADO** in Bandra is spot-on with its cocktails and the live lava stone thingamajig (the pork ribs come recommended). Not so hot is the dancing-waiter routine and the *tres leches*. We can't wait to try!

*Asado, Manorama Chambers, Ground Floor, SV Rd, Bandra (West), Mumbai; from ₹2,000 for a meal for two*

## Good news for stripe-spotters

India is home to nearly 70 per cent of the world's wild tigers, so it's heartening to learn that numbers have increased by almost a third since 2011 (from 1,706 to 2,226).

This is the sort of tiger talk we like!



## TRIP R

A bit like Tinder, but built with friendships rather than relationships in mind, **Trip R** connects locals and travellers alike who happen to be in the same place at the same time (*iOS; free*).



## GENIUS TRAVEL

Genius Travel allows users to search car rental companies, hotel rooms and flights by price rather than location, to see how far they can travel on their budget (*iOS and Android; free*).



## Countdown for The Fat Duck

You have five months left to bag a reservation at **Heston Blumenthal's THE FAT DUCK** in Melbourne, Australia. Five months before it returns to its home in Bray in September 2015. In an unprecedented move for any food establishment, much less a three Michelin-starred restaurant, the legendary chef has temporarily relocated his famous multi-course tasting menu and every team member halfway across the world. While food enthusiasts and visitors Down Under can taste iconic dishes such as Sound of the Sea, Mad Hatter's Tea Party and Snail Porridge, the Melbourne restaurant also offers an exclusive Chef's Table; for a limited time, four guests per service will be seated in front of the pass, privy to the kitchen's workings and interacting with chefs.

<http://www.thefatduckmelbourne.com>; Level 3, Crown Towers, 8, Whiteman St, Southbank, Melbourne



## Travel News

## New Resort

## ART ROTANA AMWAJ ISLANDS

has opened its doors in **Bahrain**.

The sprawling property, part of the Rotana group of hotels and resorts, has over 300 rooms and suites, all of which have ocean views. Dining options include a rustic Italian restaurant and an Asian one, a wine and tapas bar, a steak and seafood bistro and a bakery, among others. There's also a beach club, kids' club and water park on the cards ([rotana.com](http://rotana.com)).



BOOK NOW

Discounted  
Tigerair fares for  
Mastercard holdersDon't sit on that plan to go to **Singapore**.

**TIGERAIR** offers a 20 per cent discount to MasterCard cardholders on bookings till March 15, 2015 for travel in the period from March 5 to October 24, 2015. With this discount, your return fares could be as low as ₹9,299 from Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Trichy, leaving you with some extra dough for another round of Singapore Slings ([tigerair.com/promo/mastercard](http://tigerair.com/promo/mastercard)).

## New Show



## Hotel Offers

1

If all you want to do during the long Holi weekend is sit back and relax instead of getting smeared with chemical colours and soaked in water-balloon fights, **RANBANKA PALACE** in

**Jodhpur** has just the package for you. The two-night, three-day offer includes a welcome drink on arrival, two nights' accommodation with buffet breakfast and dinner, sweets and *namkeen* in the room on arrival, full-day sightseeing by car to Mehrangarh Fort, the museum, local market, Jaswant Thada and Mandore Gardens, a couple's massage for 30 minutes (choice of aromatherapy oils), a cultural performance at the hotel, complimentary use of the steam-room for 30 minutes once during the stay, free wi-fi for two hours daily, transfers from the airport, railway station or bus stand, and late check-out till 2pm (subject to availability). The package is priced at ₹14,999/ couple for the Deluxe Room, and ₹ 16,999/ couple for the Club Room, and is valid until March 31, 2015 ([ranbankahotels.com](http://ranbankahotels.com)).

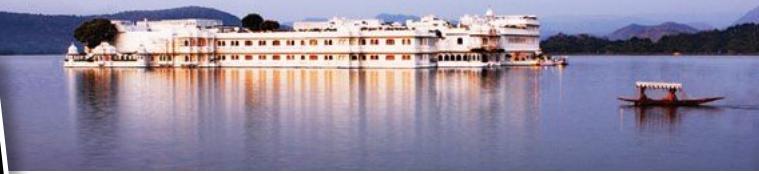
Graubünden afternoon tea. The package is valid till April 6, 2015 ([muottasmuragl.ch](http://muottasmuragl.ch)).

2

If you're lucky enough to escape the sticky summer and vacay in the Swiss Alps, check out the Winter Magic package at the **ROMANTIK HOTEL MUOTTAS MURAGL** in **Engadin, Switzerland**. Priced from ₹26,600/ person for two nights, it includes stay, return trips on the Muottas Muragl funicular railway, a breakfast buffet, a three-course romantic menu (excluding drinks) and a traditional

This year, spend the long weekends in style with greats offers from the Taj group of hotels. Pick from a royal retreat at the **TAJ LAKE PALACE UDAIPUR** (pictured here), a city break at **VIVANTA BY TAJ GURGAON**, NCR, and a wildlife break at **THE GATEWAY HOTEL GIR FOREST**. Get attractive room rates, special offers on food and beverages, free wi-fi and complimentary activities like heritage walks, sightseeing tours, safaris, spa discounts and more. Check the website for more details ([tajhotels.com](http://tajhotels.com), [vivantabytaj.com](http://vivantabytaj.com), [thegatewayhotels.com](http://thegatewayhotels.com)).

3



## Raise a leg, shake a feather!

The next time you're in **Paris**, catch the new show at **THE LIDO**, the world-famous cabaret on the Champs Elysees. The famous Bluebell girls can now be seen in a new avatar inspired by, what else, Paree, retaining all the effortless chic and glamour that a revue at The Lido promises, but with new enchantment and entertainment.

Expect breathtaking sets, sumptuous costumes, oh-so-many feathers and 60,000 sequins. This new production is created and directed by Franco Dragone, known for his production of Celine Dion's *A New Day* extravaganza in Las Vegas (<http://www.lido.fr/en.html>; the new show debuts April 2, 2015; from ₹ 11,000).

## Take an owlie in Tokyo

Unlike most cafés, **FUKURO NO MISE** in **Tokyo**, Japan, isn't known for its food or service. No, this unique eatery is ruffling feathers in a rather delightful way, thanks to its adorable residents. The café houses about 20 to 30 different species of owls with whoo-m you can take an 'owlie' as you sip your cuppa. The café is incredibly popular (obviously!), so one-hour slots are assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis. So show up early if you want to have a hoot!

*Tōkyō-to Chūō-ku Tsukishima 1-27-9; closest station: Tsukishima (one-minute walk from Exit 10)*



## TIME TO GO HOSTELLING!

The capital is obscenely expensive, with a night's stay probably costing half a liver, so you'll forgive our excitement when we hear about cheap digs here. Hostels seem to be really catching on in **New Delhi**, and **JUGAAD** is the hip new kid on the block. Centrally located in RK Puram, and close enough to the Green Park metro station, it calls itself a travellers' hostel, for travellers, by travellers. It's only just opened, and, from what we hear, it's a friendly lot out there, with the hostel promising clean dorms as well as a private room, with a lively rooftop café coming up. There's plenty more in the pipelines, with talks of a travel desk, exciting walks and more. Check the Facebook page – [facebook.com/jugaadhostel](http://facebook.com/jugaadhostel) – for more details.

## AHOY, MUMBAI!

Despite having an amazing coastline, Mumbaikars sadly don't have much opportunity to enjoy it. Now, with **CELEBRITY CRUISES** voyages to **Dubai** and **Singapore** from Mumbai, residents can say aye-aye to cruise holidays.

The six-night voyage to Dubai will begin on March 30, 2015, and will visit Muscat, Kochi, Goa and Colombo with an overnight stay in Dubai (*from USD 930/₹ 57,800 approx*). The nine-night voyage to Singapore will commence on April 10, 2015, and feature visits to Goa, Colombo and Singapore (*from USD 1,020/₹ 63,400 approx*). As this is the maiden Asian season of the Celebrity Century, expect special offers, commemorative cocktails and souvenirs, too ([tirun.com](http://tirun.com)).



PHOTOGRAPHS: TANIA & JIM THOMSON/123RF (OWLIE); CONTENT ON THIS PAGE IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY. LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA DOES NOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY MISLEADS ARISING FROM THE SAME.



**WE'VE BEEN TAKING YOU  
ALL AROUND THE WORLD.  
AND LOOK WHERE YOU'VE  
TAKEN US.**

WE'VE BEEN VOTED INDIA'S FAVOURITE TRAVEL MAGAZINE.



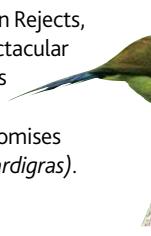


### BOAT-HOPPING THROUGH KERALA

All of us have oohhed and aahhed and almost packed a bag each time a Kerala Tourism commercial runs. Now, we're all a-quiver at the launch of the **HOP-ON HOP-OFF BOAT** service and water taxis. Visit **Bolgatty, Vypeen, Fort Kochi, Mattancherry** and the **Marine Drive** on a single ticket through the day. The water taxis, made colourful by young local artists, will ply on a point-to-point basis and are a phone call away ([keralatourism.org](http://keralatourism.org)).

### UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT'S ALL-STAR CONCERT 2015

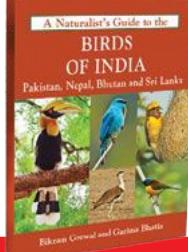
One of Florida's biggest parties, the **Mardi Gras** is on until April 18, 2015 at **UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA**. With 16 concerts, featuring The B-52s, The Band Perry, The All-American Rejects, Trey Songz and more, a spectacular parade – with colourful floats, street performers and 1.8 million beads – and tonnes of Cajun food like spicy jambalaya and gumbo, it sure promises to be a rocking party ([universalorlando.com/mardigras](http://universalorlando.com/mardigras)).



### Getting birds on the brain

That pretty yellow blob chirruping away in that tree – what on earth is it? If you tend to ask such questions, the pocket-sized *A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of India: Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka* by Bikram Grewal and Garima Bhatia is a good place to start. This is meant to be a beginner-birder's guide, easy to use and with great photos and pointers for easy identification, from one of India's best-known naturalists. Also included is a list of all Indian birds, with common and scientific names, conservation status, etc, to help you get started on many soul-balm hours

of listening to birdcall and being able to tell a sunbird from a fishing eagle (*Prakash Books, from Amazon; ₹499*).



### THE STAR WITH STRIPES

Bob Rupani travels. A lot. So when he goes on a tiger-chasing romp around India, you sit up and take note. His coffee-table book, *Tracking the Tiger*, goes across 13 tiger reserves, and includes superb photography by Dhritiman Mukherjee. The book speaks a lot

(thankfully) about conservation, and, importantly, gives smaller fauna just as much importance as the tiger: a reminder that parrots, rollers and mongooses are just as important, and that a trip without a tiger sighting isn't a disaster. The one grouse we have with



### Berlin: Five Freebies

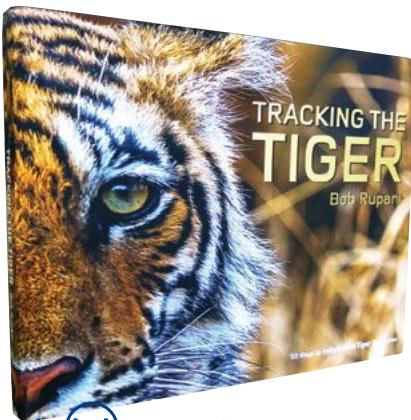
Along the Spree River, the open-air **EAST SIDE GALLERY** is a colourful ode to freedom. The longest-standing section of the Berlin Wall was painted by over a hundred artists upon reunification, with murals of peace slogans and political graffiti ([eastsidegallery-berlin.de](http://eastsidegallery-berlin.de); [Muhlenstrasse, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg](http://Muhlenstrasse, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg)).

Strapped for time? Orient yourself to Berlin's icons on a **TOUR** with **New Berlin**, which visits Checkpoint Charlie, Museum Island, the Brandenburg Gate (below), and more ([newberlintours.com](http://newberlintours.com); [meets at Brandenburg Gate; 11am & 2pm](http://meets at Brandenburg Gate; 11am & 2pm)), or get to know the city like a local, discovering street art, flea markets, and other odds and ends, with **Alternative Tours** ([alternativeberlin.com](http://alternativeberlin.com); [AlexanderplatzTV Tower; 11am & 1pm](http://AlexanderplatzTV Tower; 11am & 1pm)). Tips appreciated.

Climb to the roof of the **REICHSTAG** (above), the seat of the Bundestag, the German Parliament, for a closer look at the very cutting-edge glass dome, and unbeatable views of the Berlin skyline (00-49-30-2273-2152; [bundestag.de](http://bundestag.de); [Platz der Republik 1; 8am – 4pm; advance registration compulsory](http://Platz der Republik 1; 8am – 4pm; advance registration compulsory)).

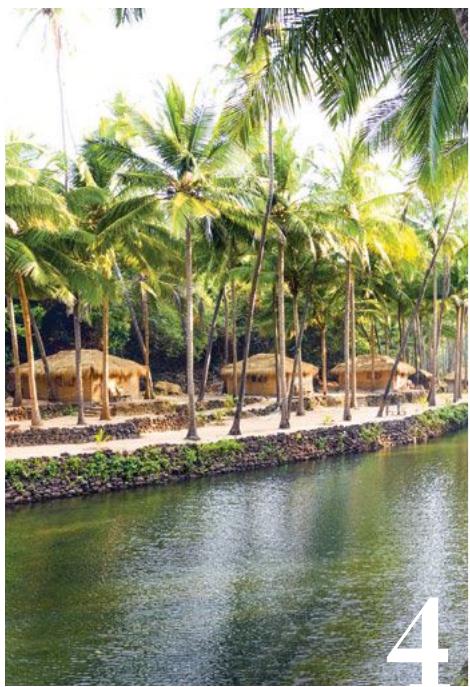
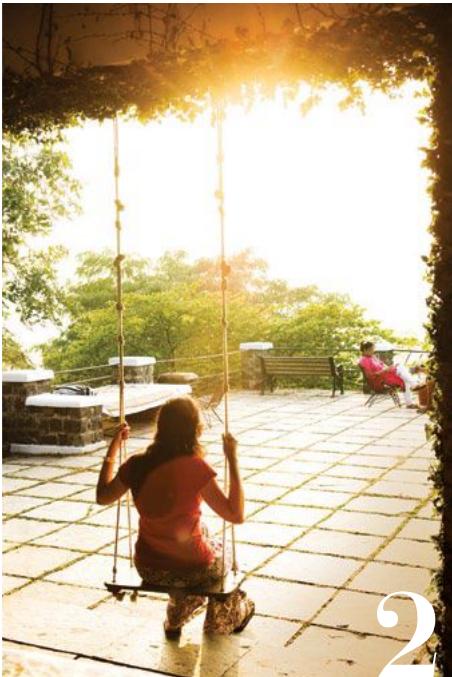
Pay your respects at the **MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE** that pays tribute to the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, in the Fields of Stelae, a haunting maze of more than 2,500 concrete slabs of varying heights across a sloping field ([stiftung-denkmal.de](http://stiftung-denkmal.de); [Cora-Berliner-Strasse 1](http://Cora-Berliner-Strasse 1)).

**TIERGARTEN**, the city's largest park, has lush green lawns and sprawling gardens, leafy creeks and pathways and, of course, beer gardens. Perfect for walks, picnics, some *hefeweizen* (wheat beer) or a snooze ([Strasse des 17.Juni](http://Strasse des 17.Juni)).



the book is that the sponsors, Land Rover, could have been better integrated, instead of as randomly-placed images of SUVs. Apart from that, this is a great pictorial journey through India's forests (*Rupani Media*; [from Amazon, Flipkart and in leading bookstores](http://from Amazon, Flipkart and in leading bookstores); ₹2,500).

# Easy Trips *you can do now*



## inside

### 1. DUBAI, The UAE

This popular emirate has all the makings of a great vacay filled with cool activities

### 2. DEOGADH THE HOMESTAY, Pawna, Maharashtra

Bundle up the kids and drive down to this homestay near Lonavala for a nature break

### 3. LAKSHMAN SAGAR, Pali, Rajasthan

Pamper your beloved with an indulgent holiday in the middle of the desert

### 4. DWARKA ECO BEACH RESORT, South Goa

Find a hidden beach, a pristine lagoon and long, lazy afternoons at this eco resort

### 5. MAWLONGBNA, Meghalaya

Explore a lesser-known happy little hamlet



## Dubai, The UAE

### ALL THAT GLITTERS

If ever you needed confirmation that our species is innovative and driven, Dubai's your weekend break. No matter when you last visited, change runs through the city as a constant, and you'll see everything – from the hotels to the malls – continuously re-inventing themselves, making it an ideal place for a quick vacay.

The hop-on, hop-off tour with the **Big Bus Company** is a great way of getting an overview of the city's past and present (00-971-4340-7709; [bigbustours.com](http://bigbustours.com); ₹ 4,040 adult, ₹ 1,700 child). Here iconic buildings, there a beach, still further a cultural centre, everywhere a shopping mall.

The on-board commentary injects the experience with insight.

The **Mall of the Emirates** has most families jumping off the bus in excitement, because, like most local malls, it's packed with everything fancy can demand and money can buy (00-971-4409-9000; [malloftheemirates.com](http://malloftheemirates.com); at Interchange 4 on Sheikh Zayed Rd; 10am – 12am Sat – Wed, till 1am Thur & Fri). But the pleasure of this constructed universe goes beyond the acquisition of brands you didn't know you wanted until you got here, to being a repository of experiences that characterise the age in which we live. Entering **Ski Dubai** in the Mall of The Emirates is like switching

Kids will love the larger-than-life aquarium at the **Dubai Mall**

continents on a magic carpet ride (00-971-4231-6292; [theplaymania.com](http://theplaymania.com); check website for timings; day-pass from ₹ 3,800 adult and child, but you can also pay only for the experiences you want). One minute you're in the desert, next you're in the snow and in a ski resort. There's an igloo, toboggan rides, and plenty of slopes on which to ski and snowboard. The gentler slopes are perfect for ski novices and kids, who will also love to interact with the penguins, and squeal with delight over the grand overview of the slopes from the chair-lift.

Another place at which you can unwind with the whole family is the **Dubai Mall** (00-971-4362-7500; [thedubaimall.com](http://thedubaimall.com);





## GREAT FROM

India

## GREAT FOR

A weekend break with family.

## GO NOW

Before the heat sets in.

PHOTOGRAPHS: HIMANSHU PANDYA, HASHIM BADANI

Doha St, off 1st Interchange – Sheikh Zayed Rd; check website for timings). Sprawling across 1,114,000sqm, you can engage in heavy-duty retail-therapy, with giant fish watching you from a larger-than-life aquarium. Check out the **Dubai**

**Aquarium & Underwater Zoo**, home to an abundance of creatures from penguins to crocodiles (00-971-4448-5200; [thedubaiaquarium.com](http://thedubaiaquarium.com); 10am – 12am; combination ticket: ₹ 1,190 adult, ₹ 935 child [three – 12 years]).

A good counterpoint to the constructed is the **Deira Spice Souk** that feels like it's right out of an Oriental fable (Baniyas Rd, Al Ras; 10am – 10pm Sat – Thur, 4pm – 9pm Fri). Mounds of dates, Arabian coffee pots, *khanjars* (daggers), and trays of antique jewellery abound. A five-minute walk away is the **Gold Souk**, at which you can watch local life unfolding, punctuated by vendors trying to sell you knock-offs on all the biggest

1. Treat the kids (and yourself) to a visit to Candylicious at the Dubai Mall

2. Snow in the middle of the desert at Ski Dubai in Mall of the Emirates – nothing's impossible in Dubai  
3. The iconic Burj Khalifa towers over you (and all else)

4. Thanks to its huge immigrant population, you can sample various cuisines here  
5. Dubai is a mall rat's paradise

brands (Al Sabkha Rd; 10am – 10pm Sat – Thur, 4pm – 10pm Fri).

And if you end up being persuaded by a tour operator to take a **dhow cruise** aboard the old-fashioned wooden boat along the city's arterial creek, look past the average buffet dinner, and focus your attention on the corridor of striking illuminated architecture past which you'll sail (several operators to choose from; from ₹ 3,000/ person).

As you gaze at the **Burj Khalifa**, the world's tallest tower that points an ambitious finger to the stars, you realise that the sky is literally the limit here.

WORDS SONIA NAZARETH

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



## FACT SHEET

### GETTING THERE

#### Closest Airport: Dubai International Airport.

SpiceJet, IndiGo, Emirates and Air India, fly non-stop to Dubai from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹13,170).

### GETTING AROUND

The metro, which runs through the city, is a convenient, economical way to get around. A one-day, all-zone pass on the metro costs ₹250. Taxis also ply frequently and fares start at ₹170. For more information, visit [dubaimetro.eu](http://dubaimetro.eu).

## WHERE TO STAY

**Orient Guest House:** This quaint restored villa has 11 Arabian-style rooms and a terrace, which offers great views of the city. The property also has two cute courtyards in which you can sit and read a book or grab a bite (00-971-4351-9111; [orientguesthouse.com](http://orientguesthouse.com); Bastakiya Area, opp Al Musalla Post Office, Al Fahidi St; from ₹10,900).

**Waldorf Astoria, Dubai Palm Jumeirah:** The rooms here are spacious, tasteful and the beds so comfortable you could be forgiven if you spent your entire weekend indoors, with your most strenuous activities being at the spa, in the heated pools, on the private beach, gazing at the Arabian Gulf and Dubai skyline from your verandah, or in the numerous restaurants (00-971-4818-2222; [waldorfastoria3.hilton.com](http://waldorfastoria3.hilton.com), [dubai@waldorfastoria.com](http://dubai@waldorfastoria.com); The Palm Jumeirah, Crescent East; from ₹23,700, prices vary depending on the number of days).

**Atlantis, The Palm:** This is an especially good stay option if you're travelling with

children. A marine theme runs through it in keeping with the views of the Arabian Gulf from its windows. Home to a private beach, the Aquaventure Waterpark, Dolphin Bay, which hosts interactive experiences with the dolphins, and the Lost Chamber Aquarium, which offers a glimpse into the marine habits of animals through underwater halls and tunnels, the Atlantis could be all things to all people (00-971-4426-2000; [atlantis.thepalm.com](http://atlantis.thepalm.com), [info@atlantis.thepalm.com](mailto:info@atlantis.thepalm.com); Crescent Rd, The Palm; from ₹29,500 with unlimited access to the Lost Chamber Aquarium and Aquaventure Waterpark and discounted rates at Dolphin Bay, prices vary depending on the number of days).

## WHERE TO EAT

More than 200 nationalities call Dubai home, so expect a whole array of cuisines from Japanese to Latin American. But if you crave an authentic local meal under the stars, and want a bit of exotica to accompany it, think **Al Hadheera**, a 40-minute drive from the main city. You'll dine in a traditional Bedouin setting, where a buffet of Arabic favourites, prepared on spit roasts or

in wood-fired ovens, beckons. Horse shows, *tanoura* dancers, falconry and live Arabic singing accompany your meal comprising *mezze* platters and Middle Eastern specialties from *sheesh* kebabs to skewers of mince. Don't miss the *machboos* – an elaborate preparation of slow-cooked lamb or chicken, served with rice (00-971-4809-6194; [meydanhotels.com](http://meydanhotels.com); Al Qudra Rd; 7pm – 11.30pm; Sat – Wed: ₹7,225/person; Thur & Fri: ₹8,415, prices are inclusive of dinner, water, entertainment, soft drink and coffee and firework displays on weekends).

## WHAT TO PACK

Sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, walking shoes, a light jacket for the evenings

## CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Mall and restaurant loos are usually spotlessly clean.

## SAFETY

It's a comparatively safe city, but dress modestly to avoid unwanted attention.

## MEDICAL AID

There are plenty of reputed hospitals here for 24-hour emergency service, like the **Emirates Hospital** (00-971-4349-6666; Jumeirah Beach Rd, opp Jumeirah Park).

## CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

There's plenty for children to do, but for a fun experience, and a place where you can leave your kids on their own, there's always **KidZania**. The little ones explore a replica of a real city, with a hospital, supermarket, press, bank and dental clinic. Earning and spending in 'kidzos', the currency of KidZania, adds to this adventure (00-971-4448-5222; [kidzania.ae](http://kidzania.ae); Doha St, Downtown Dubai, Dubai Mall, Level 2; check website for timings and prices).

## GOOD TO KNOW

**\* Visa:** A 30-day UAE tourist visa takes three to four working days, excluding Friday and Saturday, to process ([dubaivisa.net](http://dubaivisa.net); ₹5,810).

**\* Currency:** 1 AED (Emirati Dirham) = ₹16.83

**\* Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi, UAE:** [indembassyuae.org](http://indembassyuae.org)

**\* Always ask before taking pictures of people in local attire.**

**\* While the prices at the malls are fixed, haggling is the norm in all souks.**



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## Deogadh The Homestay, Pawna, Maharashtra

### AT WATER'S EDGE

It's a breezy evening and you're stretched out under the stars, the aroma of barbecued food drifting all about you. No unsightly concrete blocks your view; instead, there's an expanse of water gleaming softly. You're at Deogadh, a homestay near Lonavala whose deck faces Lake Pawna, with Tung Hill rising dramatically above.

Staying here is an experience that's both exclusive and unfussy. You're offered lemonade under an ivy-clad stone porch, which shelters an alfresco dining table. Friendly caretakers offer you simple local fare – the *bhakri*, *masale bhaat*, veggies and rustic meat dishes collide agreeably with stoked appetites.

Get hungry you will, as there are many activities to try out. The lake is a short walk from the homestay and invites you to swim towards cormorants sitting along the edge (free, *eight life jackets available*). Feel the cool earth between your toes as you tramp across the mud bank into the water. Bring your own watersports gear if you want to head out further.

The chatty hosts, Clement and Annabelle, give you a tour of the property, which has been around long enough for its mango and papaya trees to grow tall and fruitful. Their anecdotes add character to the brick pizza oven and the rescued fairground mirror.

**Above:** The breeze-kissed deck at Deogadh sparks long conversations

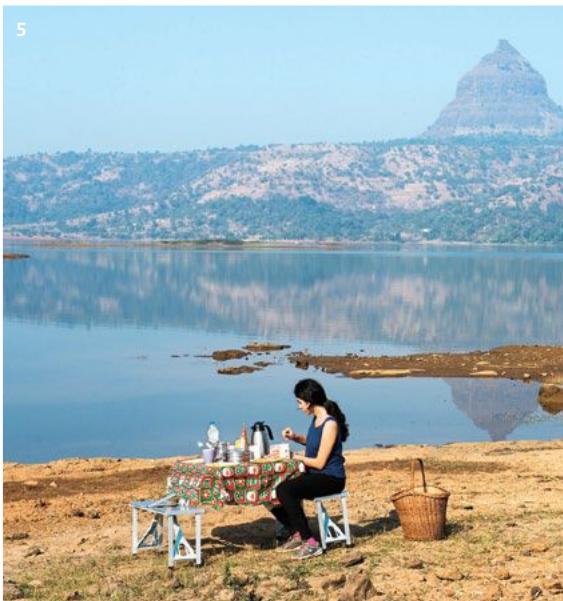
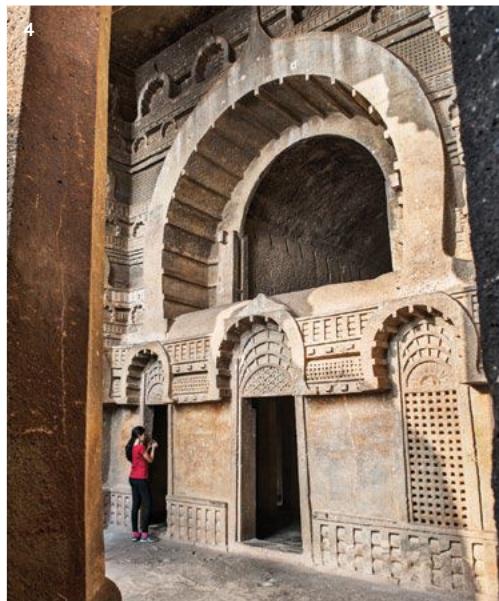
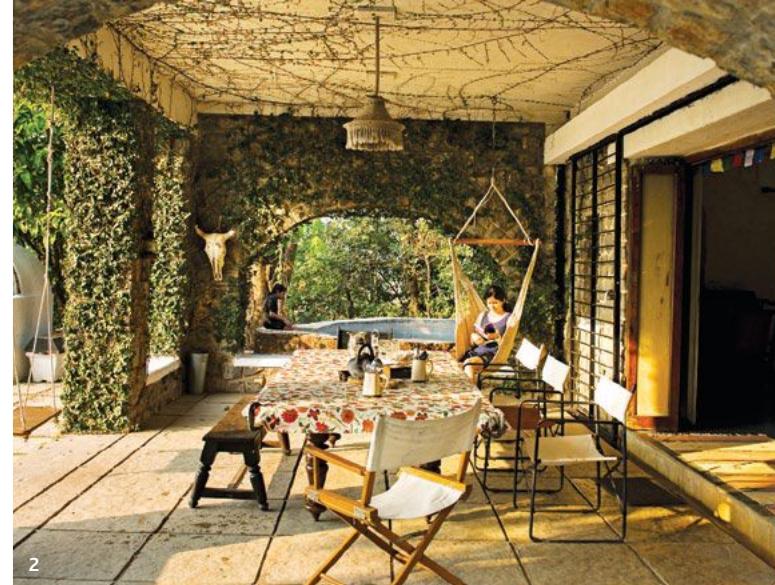
**Below:** Hot onion and potato pakodas are served with evening tea

Deogadh's plum location also makes it a good base for exploring the Pawna region. Pop over to the popular **Lohagad Boat Club** (7.5km) and take a spin on a jet-ski and in a motorboat (00-91-9823677456; [lohagadboatclub.com](http://lohagadboatclub.com); Ambegaon, Pawna Nagar Taluka, Maval; 8am – 6pm; jet-ski ride from ₹ 400/, motorboat ride from ₹ 40/ person).

Or taste a bit of history with treks to Bedse Caves (12km) and Tikona Fort (3.5km).

Built sometime between the 1st century BC and 2nd century AD, **Bedse Caves** is the lesser-known sibling of the Karla and Bhaja rock-cut caves on the ancient trade route from Kalyan in the west to Paithan in the east. An easy 25-minute





## GREAT FROM Mumbai and Pune

## GREAT FOR Families and mixed groups only.

## GO NOW

For views, refreshing dips and short treks.

climb brings you to the caves, containing a Buddhist *vihara* (residence with several cells) and carved human and animal figures atop four frontal columns. It's worth a gander if only to hear your voice echo around the smooth Roman-

style pillars (*sunrise – sunset; free, you'll be escorted by a local in your own car, ₹ 100 to ₹ 200 tip recommended*).

The climb to [Tikona Fort](#) is harder and longer (*about 60 to 90 minutes*), but getting here rewards you with a panorama of Pawna Lake and smaller lakes amid fields of rice and corn (*sunrise – sunset; free*). Narrow footpaths take you up to the strategically-built 4th-century fort, held by various rulers from Raja Bhoj and Shivaji to the Mughals and the British. Monkeys rustle above as you huff your way up to the thick buttresses, and peep at you through the cannon holes while you potter about the walled peak.

You can also stroll through [Thakursai](#)

**1. On a good day, the hosts will take you wind-surfing on the lake**

**2. The patio is where you'll spend much of your time**

**3. The antique beds at the homestay are from heritage houses in Mumbai's Khotachiwadi Village**

**4. Visit Bedse Caves to see how Buddhist monks lived 2,000 years ago**

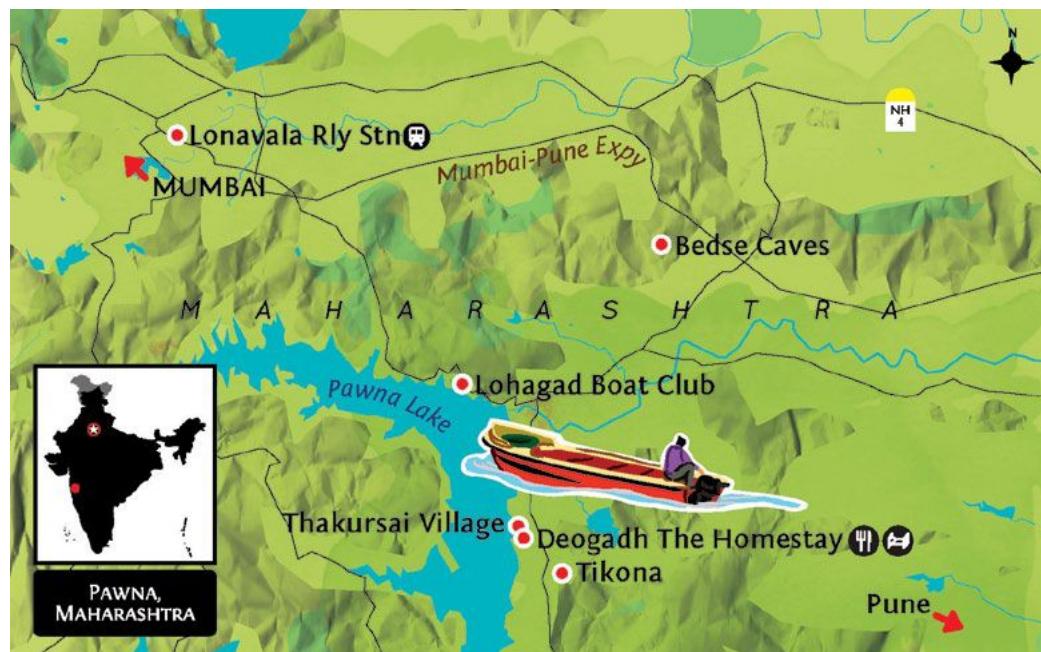
**5. Nothing spells exclusivity like a hearty picnic breakfast by the lake**

**Village**, where the homestay is situated. The caretaker Raju will give you a village tour (*free, but tip Raju at your discretion*) and even arrange a cow-milking lesson and offer you a glassful of the fruit of your slippery efforts (*7am and 7pm; tip the owner of the cow at your discretion*).

The essence of this homestay, though, is the invitation to relax and be wooed by the outdoors. Read in the hammock until the light fades. Linger over a breakfast down by the lake. Laugh into the breeze. It's a place meant for bonding, with other travellers and with nature.

**WORDS KRUTTIKA NADIG  
PHOTOGRAPHS HASHIM BADANI**

**TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE**



## FACT SHEET

### GETTING THERE

**Closest metro:** Mumbai (105km) is an easy 2.5-hour drive away via the Mumbai-Pune Expressway (take the Lonavala-NH4 exit).

**Closest city:** Pune (52km) is a 1.5-hour drive away via Pirangut and Paud.

**Closest airport:** Pune Airport (60km) is connected to most major Indian cities by all domestic airlines. Return fares start from ₹ 6,000 (from New Delhi) and ₹ 3,000 (from Bangalore). However, if you're in Mumbai, it's easier to just drive down to Pune.

**Closest railhead:** Lonavala Station (LNL; 22km).

Take the **12127 Intercity Express** (leaves Mumbai CST [CSTM] 6.40am, arrives LNL 8.48am; ₹ 305 AC Chair Car) and return by the **12128 Intercity Express** (leaves LNL 6.48pm, arrives Mumbai 9.05pm; ₹ 305 AC Chair Car). The homestay doesn't organise transfers at the moment, and there isn't any public transport, save for village jeeps, which you can take at your own risk. **It's best to drive down from Mumbai.**

### GETTING AROUND

You'll need a car to reach the homestay and explore the countryside. We travelled with **Anfa Travels** (Laeeq: 00-91-9821352189; ₹ 3,000/ day).

## WHERE TO STAY

### Deogadh The Homestay

This farmhouse enjoys prime location by Pawna Lake and accepts a carefully curated clientele. The owners prefer families, and don't normally accept large, noisy groups of boys. The homestay is only available for a minimum group size of six people. Be warned that the third bedroom is in the caretaker's cottage and is poorly furnished in comparison to the other rooms (00-91-9820045921; aberferro@gmail.com; *Thakursai Village, between Tikona Peth and Pawna Nagar, Mawal; from ₹ 7,000 with all meals, a minimum booking of six people on weekends and four people on weekdays is mandatory.*)

## WHERE TO EAT

Deogadh's cooks serve up regular rural food. You can bring your own

marinated meats and grill them on the deck – BBQ equipment and veggies are provided free of charge.

## WHAT TO PACK

Trekking/walking shoes, sunscreen, shorts and t-shirts for swimming, mosquito repellent, a light jacket in case the night gets chilly

## CLEAN LOO GUIDE

If you're driving down from Mumbai, you'll find several food malls with passably clean loos on the Expressway. Try **Shri Dutta Snacks** at Khopoli (00-91-9623922002). If you're coming from Pune, **Green Dale Restaurant** is a good place for a loo break (00-91-20-6012 3435; *Darawali, Dhanewadi Corner,*

*Below: Quirky objects, like this bullock-cart wheel, are scattered about the homestay*



*Paud [about 3km before Paud Village], Mulshi; 10am – 11pm).*

## SAFETY

The caretaker leaves at 9.30pm and it's the guests' responsibility to lock the doors after that. Swimming in this part of the lake is said to be safe because it's upstream from Pawna Dam, but caution is advised. It's safest to swim in the afternoon, as in the mornings (7am – 7.30am), the water is released down at the dam. The trek to Tikona Fort involves climbing up steep steps flanked by unreliable ropes that you shouldn't hold onto. Hold onto the steps instead and ascend slowly. Descend sideways with your hands on the wall to maintain balance.

## MEDICAL AID

 There is a first-aid kit and snake-bite kit at the homestay. Carry any medication you may need. **Kamshet Hospital** is the closest hospital (18km; 00-91-2114-262014; *Shivaji Chowk, Old Mumbai-Pune Highway, Kamshet*).

## CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Kids need to be closely watched near the lake and the rainwater-harvesting tank. Though there isn't much space to safely throw a ball or swing a racquet, kids can be introduced to a number of fun activities like trekking, watersports, birding and interaction with farm animals. They can also participate in the Bedse Caves expedition as long as they're able to walk on their own. The recommended minimum age for climbing Tikona Fort is 12 years.

## GOOD TO KNOW

\* There's no TV or wi-fi, and the only phone networks that work here are Vodafone and Airtel.

\* To make the most of your stay, check that owners Clement and Annabel will be around when you're staying.

\* In the monsoon, kids can even jump into the rainwater-harvesting tank (depth: five feet).

\* The homestay owners can also organise for a pizza-baking session under the stars but only for a minimum booking of 15 people and only when the owners are around (free).

\* Remember to carry water and visit the loo before visiting the Bedse Caves and Tikona Fort.

YOU DON'T COME HERE  
TO CATCH UP  
ON YOUR SLEEP.



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# 3

## Lakshman Sagar, Pali, Rajasthan

### A ROYAL OASIS

It's a quiet afternoon in Rajasthan and you're fishing in a small private lake. A blue bull dozes on the opposite bank, and flocks of peacocks fly overhead. You're tempted to take a dip in the water but it seems too full of aquatic life, so you turn around and jump into a personal plunge pool instead. You lie in the backyard of your cottage, with a book or a sherbet, until you're summoned for lunch in the erstwhile *mardana* section of this 19th-century hunting lodge. It's a lovely, indulgent and completely indolent life at Lakshman Sagar, one that you could very easily get used to.

Founded by Rajput ruler Lakshman

Singh back when hunting was a royal pastime, this restored property sits by a large and lively watering hole. Natural and recycled materials are shaped into earthy luxury – be it the lakeside cottages made of wood and stone, a dramatic rock-cut swimming pool, or pathway lamps made from old milk cans and engine-oil filters. Clothes hangers padded with tribal fabrics, *attar* (perfume) bottles holding liquid soap and fruit squashes, and fireplaces that resemble a weaverbird's nest bring Rajasthani life and culture right into your bedroom.

Twelve eco-friendly rooms dot the 32-acre rocky desert around Lakshman Sagar's two original structures,

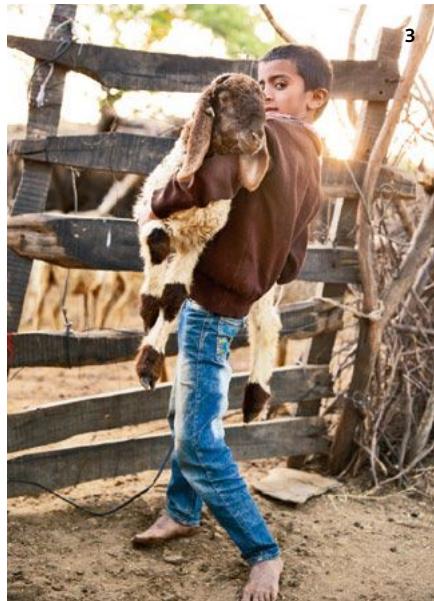
Above: Village-inspired interiors brighten up the roomy cottages

Below: Fresh buttermilk, churned the traditional way, is great after a heavy lunch



called *mardana* and *zenana* – male and female quarters. But with the days of gender segregation left happily in the past, today, everyone comes together for a sundowner on the *zenana*'s terrace every evening. You're offered ginger tea or local liqueurs in fragrant varieties like rose, mint and cardamom as the sun sets over the *mehndi* fields. Soon, the desert wind starts to nip and nudge you towards the crackling bonfire, where you're plied with kebabs while local folk artistes brighten the night with song and dance.

The food and scenery here is familiar yet different – the road is blocked by camels instead of cows, and the *halwa* in your dessert bowl is made of sweet



## GREAT FROM

Jodhpur, Jaipur, New Delhi, Ahmedabad

## GREAT FOR

Couples of all ages

## GO NOW

Before the summer heat sets in.

potato instead of carrot. Most of the veggies here are grown on site, which is a good excuse to take a look around.

Apart from peering at rows of veggies, you can go on a nature walk and discover a porcupine's burrow or a jackal's footprint, and immerse yourself

in the cacophony of babbler, whistling ducks and others. Or take a [jeep safari](#) into the neighbouring villages and find out first-hand from a potter just how difficult it is to make a small clay *kulhad*. Amble on and you can watch a shoemaker in the market rolling leather sandals into a ball to prove their suppleness. Later, visit a red chilli farm to see how some people's lives are wrapped up in carpets of spice. Get a glimpse of royal life by dropping in at the 17th-century [Raipur Fort](#) and take one of its resident horses out for a trot. The fort and Lakshman Sagar are owned by the same family, who allow only resort guests this access (*village safari and visit to the fort: ₹ 1,500/ couple, pottery:*

**1. There's nothing like a pick-me-up on the zenana terrace after a refreshing swim**

**2. Bonfires at Lakshman Sagar keep conversation flowing well into the night**

**3 & 5. You'll encounter many friendly faces (and goats!) on a walk around the property**

**4. The rooms are designed in a way that allows the sunshine to flood the interiors**

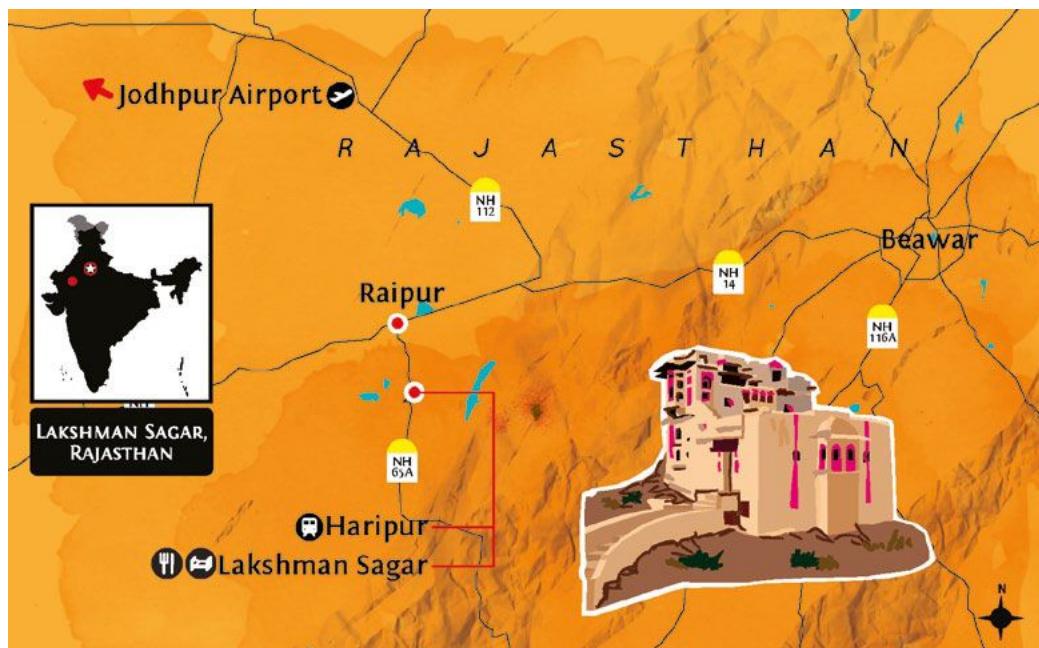
₹ 1,000/ person, horse safari: ₹ 1,500/ person/ hour). For another exclusive experience, sign up for a [field breakfast](#) to enjoy the warm hospitality and wholesome rustic fare served up by a farmer's family. It doesn't get more authentic than a plate of fresh *churma laddoos* placed on a comfy cot in the outdoors, along with buttermilk churned the traditional way.

Everything you see, touch and imbibe here is an echo of the land's character. By the end of your stay you're sure to feel a great connectedness to it.

WORDS KRUTTIKA NADIG

PHOTOGRAPHS VAIBHAV MEHTA

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



## FACT SHEET

### GETTING THERE

**Closest metro:** New Delhi (490km) is a day's drive away.

**Closest airport:** Jodhpur Airport (150km) is connected to New Delhi and Mumbai by Air India and Jet Airways (return fares from ₹6,300).

**Closest railhead:** Haripur Station (HP; 3km). Take the 19032 Haridwar Mail (leaves Delhi

Shahdara [DSA] 9.25pm, arrives HP 8.06am; ₹835 Third AC). Return to New Delhi by the 19031 Haridwar Mail (leaves HP 6.29pm, arrives DSA 5.46am; ₹835 Third AC).

### GETTING AROUND

The hotel can arrange for a pick-up from Jodhpur Airport (AC Etios: ₹3,500 one-way) or Haripur Station (free).

## WHERE TO STAY

**Lakshman Sagar:** Designed to blend into the rural heart of Rajasthan, this is a great romantic retreat. The decor isn't OTT Rajasthani – and every room comes with its own plunge pool! Be warned: lizards tend to come into the cottages through the window gaps (reservations: 00-91-11-26494531;

sewara.com, reservations@sewara.com; near Raipur Village, Pali District; from ₹28,000 with all meals, nature walk, field breakfast, birding, angling, star-gazing and folk dance performance; other activities charged separately, see Good to Know).

Above: A field breakfast lets you enjoy local delicacies in style, and provides some income to the host family

## WHERE TO EAT

The fixed menu at Lakshman Sagar

has Indian veg and non-veg dishes, with some Rajasthani delicacies like *mangodi* (a *moong dal* dish) thrown in. There are no other restaurants around as the property is set in the middle of the desert, so it's best to eat at the resort (see Where to Stay).

## WHAT TO PACK

Comfortable shoes, warm jacket, hat and sunscreen, swimwear, insect repellent and a book

## CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Haripur Station is only 3km away, so you won't require a loo stop. If you're flying into Jodhpur, it's best to use the toilet at the airport before heading to Pali.

## SAFETY

Stay inside the resort after dark – it's well lit and well-staffed, so wild animals won't come near. Swimming isn't advisable in the lake; use your private pool instead.

## MEDICAL AID

The hotel has a first-aid kit as well as a doctor on call. For bigger emergencies, you can head to **Goyal Hospital** in Jodhpur, 135km away (00-91-291-2432236, 00-91-9829027144; goyalhospital.org; 961/3, Residency Rd, opp Rotary Hall, Jodhpur).

## CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

The minimum age limit for children is 12 years. However, this resort isn't well suited for kids unless they like quiet places and can keep themselves entertained. Also, the terrain is rocky and every cottage is set on uneven ground.

## GOOD TO KNOW

\* The property is closed from May to August.

\* There's no TV or wi-fi, and phone connectivity might be limited.

\* Folk performances are held on alternate nights. If there's any experience you particularly want to try, it's best to mention it while booking.

\* Apart from the activities mentioned in the story, the resort offers other options like visits to **Fatehgarh Fort** (₹2,000/ couple) and **Fort Bagri** (₹2,000/ person full-day excursion with lunch), cooking classes (₹1,000/ session) and turban-tying classes (₹1,000/ person).

SOMETIMES,  
A CAMERA ONLY COMES  
IN THE WAY.

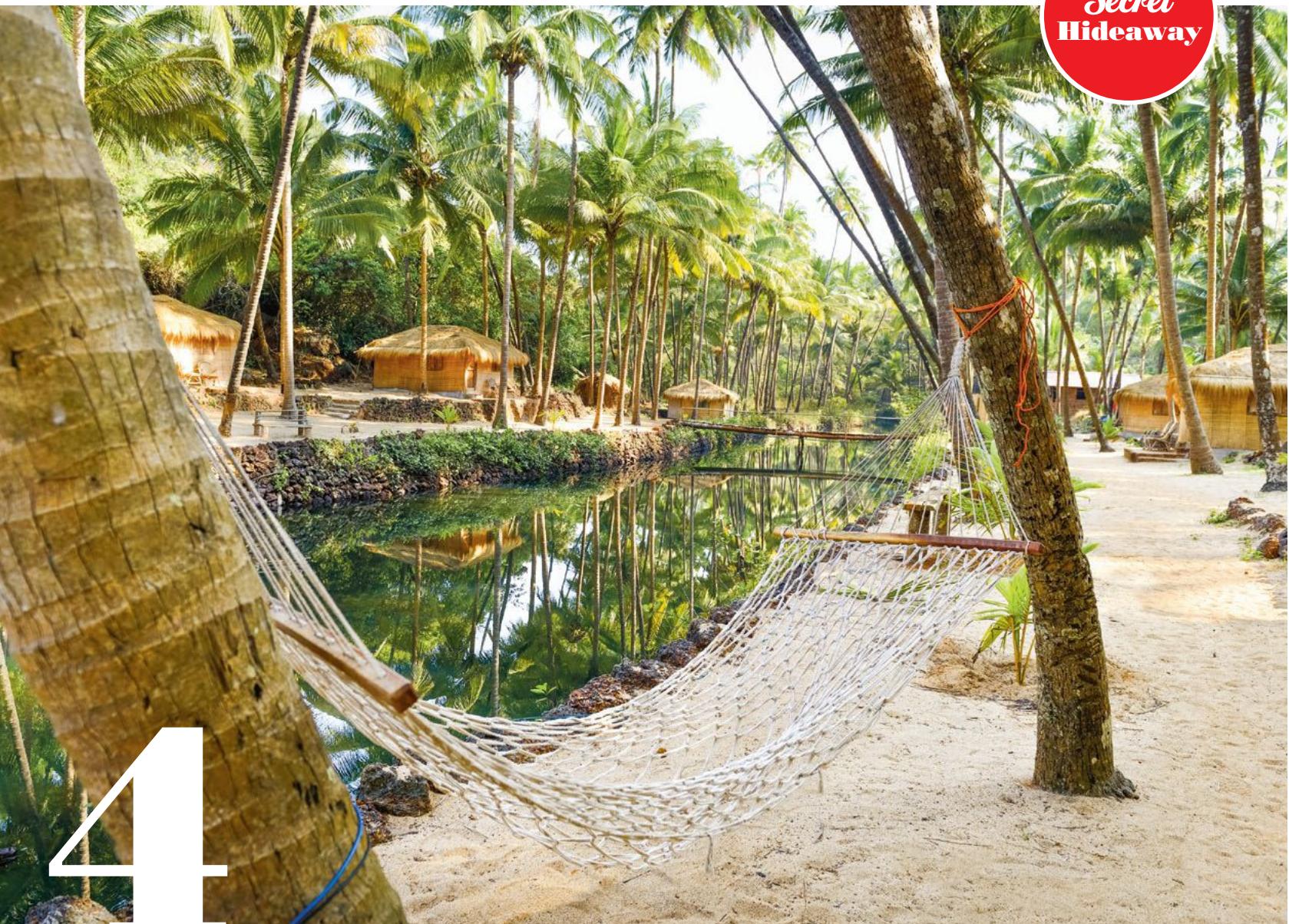


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4



## Dwarka Eco Beach Resort, South Goa

### A LOST BEACH

As secrets go, this is a really good one. A lost beach, a natural lagoon and a forest full of exotic birds are probably worth keeping under wraps. Dwarka Eco Resort, which sits deep in South Goa, is exactly that sort of a place and also perhaps the only one in the state that the Russians or noisy Indian tourists haven't conquered yet. It could be because the resort owners don't believe in loud beach parties or fancy bungalows, but it could also be because most people have no idea it exists.

Your journey to Dwarka will not be an easy one. Roads simply don't exist. A two-hour drive from the airport will, at some point, take you off-road onto

a bumpy dirt track that will rattle your ribcage. But all that noise inside your body will cease as you come upon a still, green lagoon around which 10 cottages sit in contented silence. You are, at this point, kind of forced to go into Zen mode because any other state of being is simply not possible.

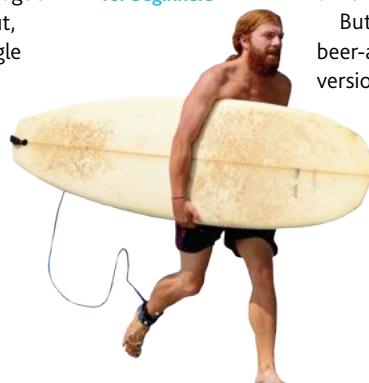
During your stay at Dwarka, this lagoon will become your pool, your hangout, the spot from which to sight the eagle that dutifully bathes there every morning, or pretty much anything else you want it to be. For families with kids, this is the safest playground, and hours can be spent digging sand routes between

Above: The clear emerald lagoon is the centrepiece of Dwarka Eco Beach Resort

Below & 5 (facing page): The gentle waves at the neighbouring beach are ideal for beginners

the banks of the lagoon and the beach while parents perch themselves at the shack that doubles up as the restaurant. You can be sure you'll be getting your daily dose of veggies (*aloo-gobi* alert!), but you'll forgive them because your table overlooks the pretty lagoon and sea, and your kids have never had a better time zigzagging between the two.

But if you're coming here for the beer-and-binge or the partying-till-dawn version of Goa, this is a memo for you to turn back. This version of Goa has kayaking on the lagoon (₹ 300/ hour), walks on forest trails teeming with kingfishers and woodpeckers, and boat rides





### GREAT FROM

Mumbai, Bangalore

### GREAT FOR

A quiet version of Goa

### GO NOW

To enjoy Goa without the crowds.

to spot dolphins that are rather frisky here. In fact, the boat ride does not present any doubt about dolphin sightings, because, of course, you'll see the lovely creatures, the only question is how many there will be (₹ 500/ person).

For most people, this, along with

a full-body Kerala massage (₹ 1,400/ 90 minutes), would be the limit of activity that should be done on a holiday. But if you feel deprived of the surf and that one butter-garlic-prawn feast, this is resolved with a climb up the hill that shelters the resort and down another that brings you to the neighbouring beach. This walk has the kind of ocean views that will make you want to sit down and decide to give up the world and its material pleasures.

The beach itself is one of the Goa's most unexpectedly stunning stretches of coastline (car transfer: ₹ 400; boat: ₹ 1,500). There's no blackish sand, just a wide, generous swathe of almost white-powder sands overlooking

1. Kayaking in the sea and lagoon on lazy afternoons is highly recommended

2. The comfy eco cottage is minimalist but the sit-out makes up for it

3. The trails around the property are great for birding and nature walks

4. The beach and its lagoon make for a perfectly safe and incredibly fun kiddie playground

blue waters. Settle down at a shack, order a seafood platter and watch the huge waves lash at hapless swimmers, or you can grab a surfboard and fight it out like a man (00-91-9011840991; ₹ 500/ hour; lessons: ₹ 1,000/ hour).

This kind of day, although perfect in its way, strangely, makes you want more of Dwarka's quiet way of life. You want to come back to your secret lagoon, lit up by shack-lights, and go back into Zen mode, listening to the crash of the waves. And if the price for enjoying that is *aloo-gobi*, so be it!

WORDS SHARAN SAIKUMAR

PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA



## FACT SHEET

### GETTING THERE

**Closest metro:** Mumbai (604km) is a 12-hour drive via the scenic Ratnagiri route.

**Closest airport:** Goa International Airport (57km) is a two-hour drive away. Air India, SpiceJet, GoAir, IndiGo and Jet Airways fly non-stop to Goa from Mumbai (return fares from ₹3,880).

**Closest railhead:** Madgaon Railway Station (MAO; 33km). This is perhaps the most scenic train ride you will take in the country. Take the **10111 Konkan Kanya Express** (leaves Mumbai CST [CSTM] 11.05pm, arrives MAO 10.45am; ₹1,055).

Third AC) and return by the same **10112 Konkan Kanya Express** (leaves MAO 6pm, arrives CSTM 5.50am; ₹1,055 Third AC).

### GETTING AROUND

Goa is usually fun on bikes, but here, on these empty stretches, you might be hard-pressed to find one to rent and the roads will discourage you anyway. In any case, you won't need anything more than your own two feet if all you plan to do is hang around the property and on the neighbouring beach. If you want to go on longer drives, rented cabs are the only way to go. The resort will arrange one on request (₹1,500/80km).

## WHERE TO STAY

### Dwarka Eco Beach Resort, Goa:

There are only 10 cottages with thatched roofs and a lagoon, and yet the Dwarka Eco Beach Resort doesn't let its bare-bones structure stand in the way of delivering an outstanding de-stress experience. The cottages are simple but comfortable. If you're expecting a trendy eco resort with splashes of style, this isn't the place for you – Dwarka is about going back to basics and putting privacy and silence above it all (00-91-9823377025; dwarkagoa.com, dwarkagoa@gmail.com; address given upon confirmation of booking; cottages [high season]: ₹7,500/night with all meals).

The cook will do a mini-crab masala or shark fry on the side sometimes, but you will also get *kathi* rolls filled with tomato sauce – so don't expect gourmet meals.

**Above and below:**  
The silence and privacy in this area attract a lot of international travellers of all ages

## WHAT TO PACK

Sturdy walking shoes and ample mosquito repellent as the resort is located close to a lagoon, which tends to attract the pesky things in droves

## CLEAN LOO GUIDE

The drive from the airport to property is just an hour-and-a-half, so do your thing at the airport before you head off. There are no pitstops on the way, and most of the drive is through open country, so, unless you're carrying hand-sanitiser and toilet paper, hold it in!



## SAFETY

The waters off the beach at the resort have strong tides, so while there's always a watchful lifeguard on duty, the lagoon might be a better idea for some stress-free lounging. Also, while the sunsets at the top of the hill are spectacular, the rocky edges are not so – evening hikes are a strict no-no.

## MEDICAL AID

Medical help is a short hike and rough ride away. The nearest help-centre is at **Cancona**, 14km away. But once you're in the area **Dhavalikar Hospital** will take care of small emergencies (00-91-832-2643147; Devbag, Palolem Beach Rd).

## CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

This place is a dream for kids. A patch of soft sand with water on both sides is the stuff that most childhoods should be made of. Add kayak rides and dolphin sightings, and you have the makings of an unforgettable kiddie break.

## GOOD TO KNOW

\* Mobile phone network is limited here.

\* There is wi-fi but it's whimsical and dependent on electricity.

\* Carry a multi-plug so that you can charge all your devices at once whenever you get the chance.

\* Loud music is not permitted here.

# 3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK. A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



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## 5



## Mawlongbna, Meghalaya

### IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

You might observe that Scrat of *Ice Age* fame would have a worthy human counterpart in your forest guide. Michael John nimbly forages through Mawlongbna's mulchy forest for edible nuts and fruit that he then proudly but wordlessly hands over to you for sampling. This human squirrel is just one of many intriguing locals who will pique your interest in this blink-and-you'll-miss-it-village hidden amid the East Khasi hills of Meghalaya.

Brothers Aaron and Zorba Laloo of [Campfire Trails](#) have collaborated with Mawlongbna's cooperative society (a local body founded to create profitable

projects for the betterment of the village) to assist [Traveller's Nest](#), a village-stay property, in promoting sustainable tourism in the area. This organic homestay is staffed by locals, who multitask as guides, cooks and cleaners, in addition to their farming or household duties.

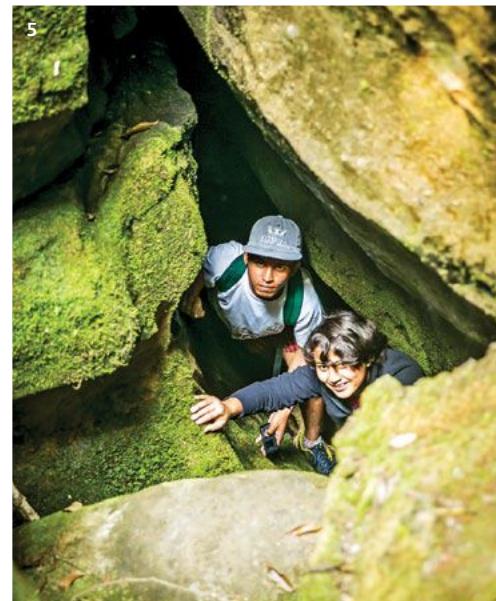
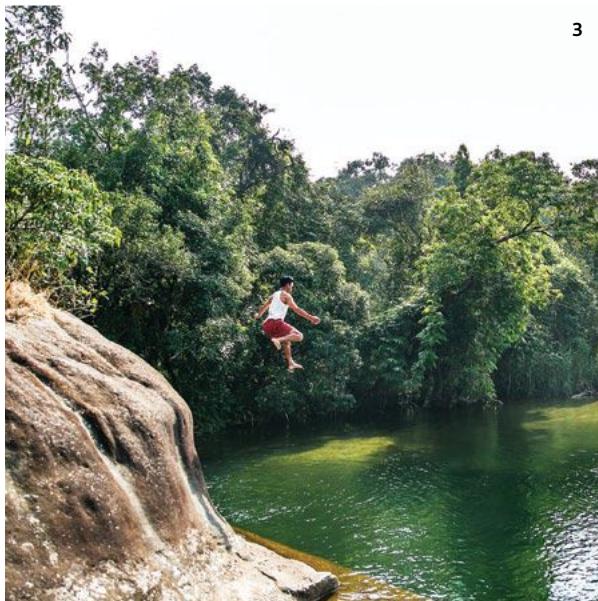
Upon arrival, you are greeted with a snack of yam drizzled with jungle-sourced honey accompanied with a large cup of strong, local red tea – both of which are much-needed fuel for the forest walk that you are whisked away on. The easy two-hour hike has you negotiating low-hanging branches and moss-covered boulders as you precariously balance on narrow water pipes

The forest walk involves swinging like Tarzan on ficus creepers

over little streams, Tarzan-ing on hanging ficus creepers, plunging into pools of cool water, and walking across wide open fields of dry grass, leading you to a stony plateau scattered with fossils.

Said to be 49 million years old, the shellfish fossils indicate that the land here was once under the sea. You're led to natural bucket chair-shaped rock formations on which you can sit and catch your breath and learn about the history behind the formations you have just seen. Even the plant life here is intriguing. Take, for instance, the endemic, carnivorous Indian pitcher plant that traps unsuspecting victims in its 'pitfall traps' – a trapping





#### GREAT FROM Shillong, Kolkata, Guwahati

#### GREAT FOR Families with older kids and small groups

#### GO NOW While it's still off the tourist radar.

mechanism, which has a chamber full of liquid. The guide opens one, revealing a slimy bunch of partially-digested flies.

You'll be amazed by the changes in the landscape, but they aren't anywhere as fascinating as Khasi folklore

– adjacent to the fossil area is **Ka lew Luri**. According to Khasi mythology, there was a time when man and animals could communicate with each other and this was the market place. While communication has ceased between the two today, the matrilineal village hosts frequent night markets at which stalls sell everything from smelly dried fish to cheap Chinese knockoffs. People get together under dim yellow lights to sell wares, shop and mingle with fellow villagers. Make a pit stop at **Dinares Wahlang Tea Stall** and watch a steady trickle of villagers drop in for some local gossip over many cups of red Khasi tea (₹ 10).

The next day, you're treated to a picnic

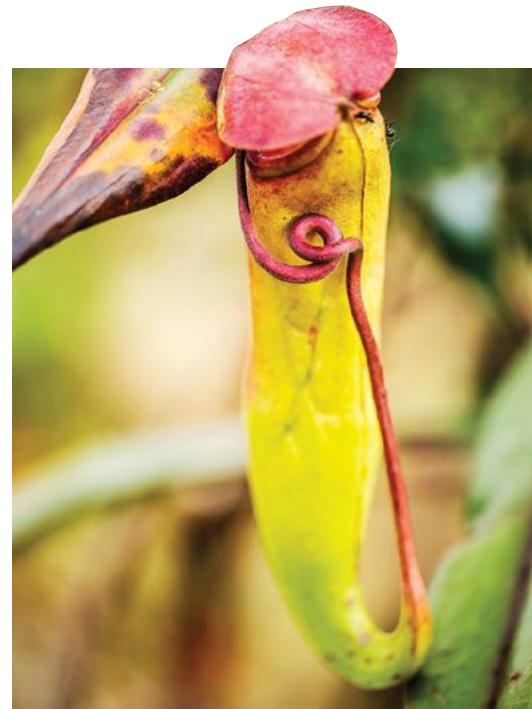
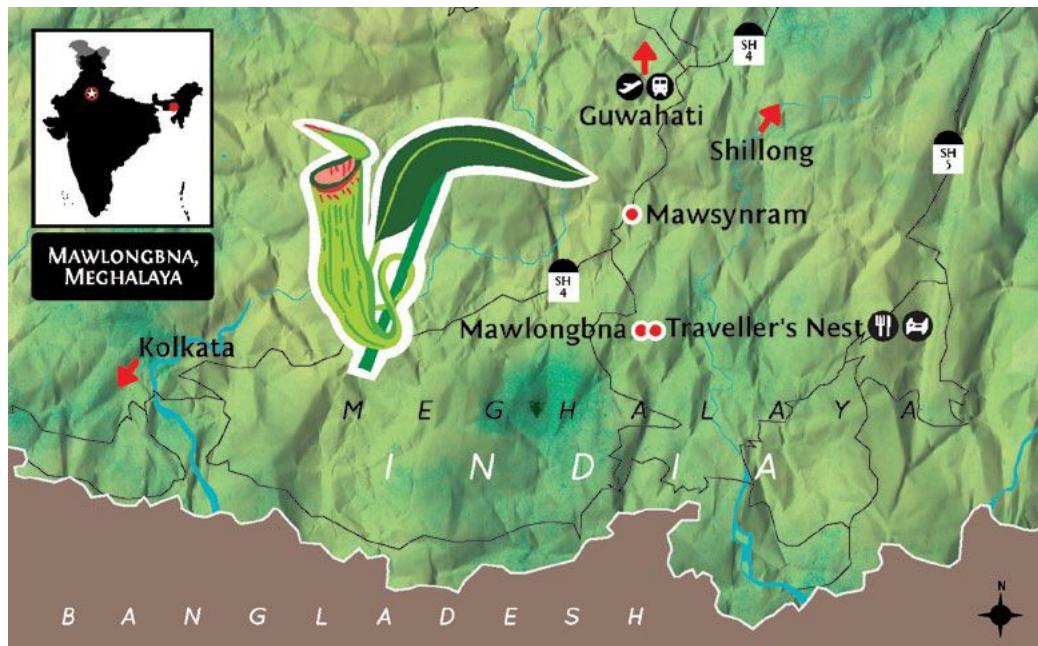
1. Take a load off at the natural bucket-chair rock formations
2. You'll need to be in fairly good physical condition to do the forest walk
3. Nature is your playground in Mawlongbna
4. Keep your eyes peeled for all kinds of weird and wonderful creatures
5. You'll come across intriguing landscapes on the forest walk

lunch besides **Umkhakoi Lake** after a short session of kayaking. The lake is interspersed with flat boulders – perfect for lounging in the sun.

Watching the locals' betel nut-stained smiles makes you realise how banal city life can be. Eager to make this project work and fiercely protective of their surroundings, it's these locals who make your trip to this secluded destination a memorable one. Although the nearby village of **Mawlynnong** (100km) has been voted Asia's cleanest village, this hidden hamlet is certainly one of the happiest!

WORDS FRIYAN DRIVER

PHOTOGRAPHS VAIBHAV MEHTA



## FACT SHEET

### GETTING THERE

**Closest metro:** Kolkata (1,152km)

**Closest cities:** Shillong (75km),

Guwahati (198km)

**Closest airport:** Guwahati Airport (179km).

Air India, GoAir, IndiGo and Jet Airways fly to Guwahati Airport from Kolkata (return fares from ₹3,000).

**Closest railhead:** Guwahati Railway Station (GHY; 197km). Take the 12345 Saraihat Express

(leaves Howrah Junction [HWH] 3.50pm, arrives GHY 9.30am; ₹1,305 Third AC) and return by the 12346 Saraihat Express (leaves GHY 12.35pm, arrives HWH 5.10am; ₹1,265 Third AC).

### GETTING AROUND

It's a long drive from Guwahati, so it's better to spend a night in Shillong and set off early the next day. **Campfire Trails'** package cost includes transport from Shillong to Mawlongbna and back.

from Traveller's Nest (00-91-9615471580; BPO Mawsynram, East Khasi Hills District). For major medical emergencies, it's advisable to make your way back to the capital city of Shillong.

## SAFETY

Although the area is perfectly safe, it's best not to roam around once it's dark. All activities are conducted with the utmost attention to safety. Follow the directions provided by your guide and never stray away from him in the forest.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Travellers' Nest:** This property has two simple yet comfortable cottages nestled within the community-protected forest. Each comes with attached balconies that are made for doing a whole lot of nothing. Even the furniture in these cottages has been sourced from nearby villages (00-91-8415921719; [campfireshillong.com](http://campfireshillong.com), [campfire.shillong@gmail.com](http://campfire.shillong@gmail.com); Mawlongbna Village; from ₹3,500/ person for a two-day, one-night package with stay, all meals, guide charges, all activities, equipment used for the activities, all entry fees, and pick-up and drop from Shillong).

a mix of cabbage and chillies, along with *tungtap* (dried fish chutney). Inform the property in advance if you're vegetarian.

## WHAT TO PACK

A warm jacket, mosquito repellent, shoes with a good grip, motion-sickness medicines, swimmers, toiletries, prescription medication and a torch

**Above:** It might look pretty tame, but the pitcher plant traps flies and small insects in the blink of an eye

**Below:** Adventure-seekers will never fall short of things to do in this little village

## CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Three hours into your drive from Guwahati Airport to Shillong, stop at **Orchid Lake Resort** (00-91-364-2570258; Umiam Lake, Guwahati-Shillong Rd, Ri Bhoi District; 7am – 9.30pm). There are no loos between Shillong and Mawlongbna, so make sure you use the loo here.



## MEDICAL AID

The Campfire Trails guides are trained in first-aid and CPR.

**Civic Health Center** in Mawsynram is 16km

## CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Keep an eye on your tots as the terrain is difficult to negotiate, especially around the rock-cut pools. Some activities like kayaking and mountain-biking might not be suitable for very young kids.

## GOOD TO KNOW

\* Do not click photos of the locals without their permission, especially of children, who aren't used to visitors.

\* Older travellers should note there are quite a few steps to climb to get to the Travellers's Nest cottages.

\* Activities like rappelling can be arranged at the nearby **Umdikain Waterfall**. Snorkelling, too, can be arranged at Umkhakoi Lake (included in the tariff).

\* Just 16km away is **Mawsynram**, which is famous for being the wettest place on the planet.

\* Carry cash as ATMs are hard to find.



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## South Delhi: 5 Smart Stays

### UNUSUAL OR JUST PLAIN WALLET-FRIENDLY HOTELS

Where you choose to stay when you travel is an important part of your overall experience. These characterful B&Bs, which are extensions of the personality of their owners, can add heart to your stay. That most come with flexible breakfast timings, free wi-fi, attached bathrooms, a mix of international and Indian guests, and safety for single women travellers are just some of the perks of staying here.

**ON THE HOUSE:** Tucked away in a leafy neighbourhood, On The House is one of those gems you want to keep to yourself. Decorated with colour and eclectic flair, each room has a thematic personality all its own. A very English, stylishly-pink, rose-themed room, sits next to an altogether Orientally disposed one.

The flamboyant spirit extends to the terrace garden, which showcases the serenity of this neighbourhood. The family and the staff is warm and welcoming. Room rates at the moment are too good to be true, so visit before a revision in price is contemplated (00-91-9811047414; [bedandbreakfastnewdelhi.com](http://bedandbreakfastnewdelhi.com), [aradhna.lanba@gmail.com](mailto:aradhna.lanba@gmail.com); B-4/120, Safdarjung Enclave; from ₹ 3,500 with breakfast).

### SAKET BED AND BREAKFAST:

'Comfortable' and 'peaceful' are some of the adjectives used when describing this home-away-from-home. The rooms have a relaxed aesthetic, and it feels like you're staying in a quintessential Dilli home with friends. The owner, Anand, is very hands-on, always ready to share



what he loves about the city.

The breakfast table, against a backdrop of potted plants, comes dotted with a mix of cosmopolitan guests (00-91-9582872580, 00-91-11-41005460; [saketbedandbreakfast.com](http://saketbedandbreakfast.com), [saketbedandbreakfast@gmail.com](mailto:saketbedandbreakfast@gmail.com); 2nd Floor, D21, Marg 13, Saket; from ₹ 4,500 with breakfast).

### BED & CHAI GUEST HOUSE:

This funky, kitschy, stay option is another good pick. Everyday objects are given a meaningful twist here, and you'll see lamps made from kettles, mosaics made of Jodhpuri tiles in the bathrooms, a stenciled elephant on the wall. Bed & Chai Guest House is especially popular with travellers who want a safe, clean, easy-on-the-pocket option. The hotel also offers assistance with train-ticket bookings and luggage-storage facilities, arranges massages, and organises cooking classes on request (00-91-11-46066054, 00-91-8527884555; [bedandchai.com](http://bedandchai.com), [contact@bedandchai.com](mailto:contact@bedandchai.com); R-55, Greater Kailash 1; dorms from ₹ 850/ person without attached bathroom, rooms with attached bathroom from ₹ 3,000 with breakfast; carry your own toiletries).

**AMARYA VILLA:** The rooms – all named after Indian gemstones – are jewel bright, colourful and spacious. The more you look, the more details you uncover – a mirror here, a brass statue there, a cosy nook fitted with a writing table elsewhere. Underlying it all, the entire place is an intimate alternative to the five-star chains – the fabrics used are lavish, the artefacts stylish, and the aesthetic Indian-meets-luxurious contemporary design (00-91-11-41036184; [amarayagroup.com](http://amarayagroup.com), [amarayavilla@amarayagroup.com](mailto:amarayavilla@amarayagroup.com); A2/20, Safdarjung Enclave; from ₹ 5,350 with breakfast).

1. On The House is filled with cool knick-knacks

2 & Below: Saket Bed and Breakfast is clean, comfy and offers home-cooked food – what more could you ask for?

3. Bed & Chai Guest House is a cheerful, pocket-friendly option

**SCARLETTE:** This sophisticated property offers a blend of Indian heritage with a French touch. The rooms are large and airy, livened up by photographs and artefacts. You can lounge in the drawing room, which is also where the central table, laden with home-baked cakes (₹ 50/ slice), sits along with art books waiting to be perused (00-91-8826010278/ 00-91-11-41023765; [scarlette-newdelhi.com](http://scarlette-newdelhi.com), [reservations@scarlette-newdelhi.com](mailto:reservations@scarlette-newdelhi.com), B2/139 Safdarjung Enclave; from ₹ 7,000 with breakfast).

WORDS SONIA NAZARETH

PHOTOGRAPHS KRISHNA ANGIRA



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YOU MAKE THE CONNECTION.



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# Features

**PG 60** Scream and shout your way through **Interlaken**'s many exciting (and less-known) attractions | **PG 74** From hidden-away beaches and trad Thai eats to intriguing tribes and more – follow our ideal itinerary across **Thailand's Islands** |

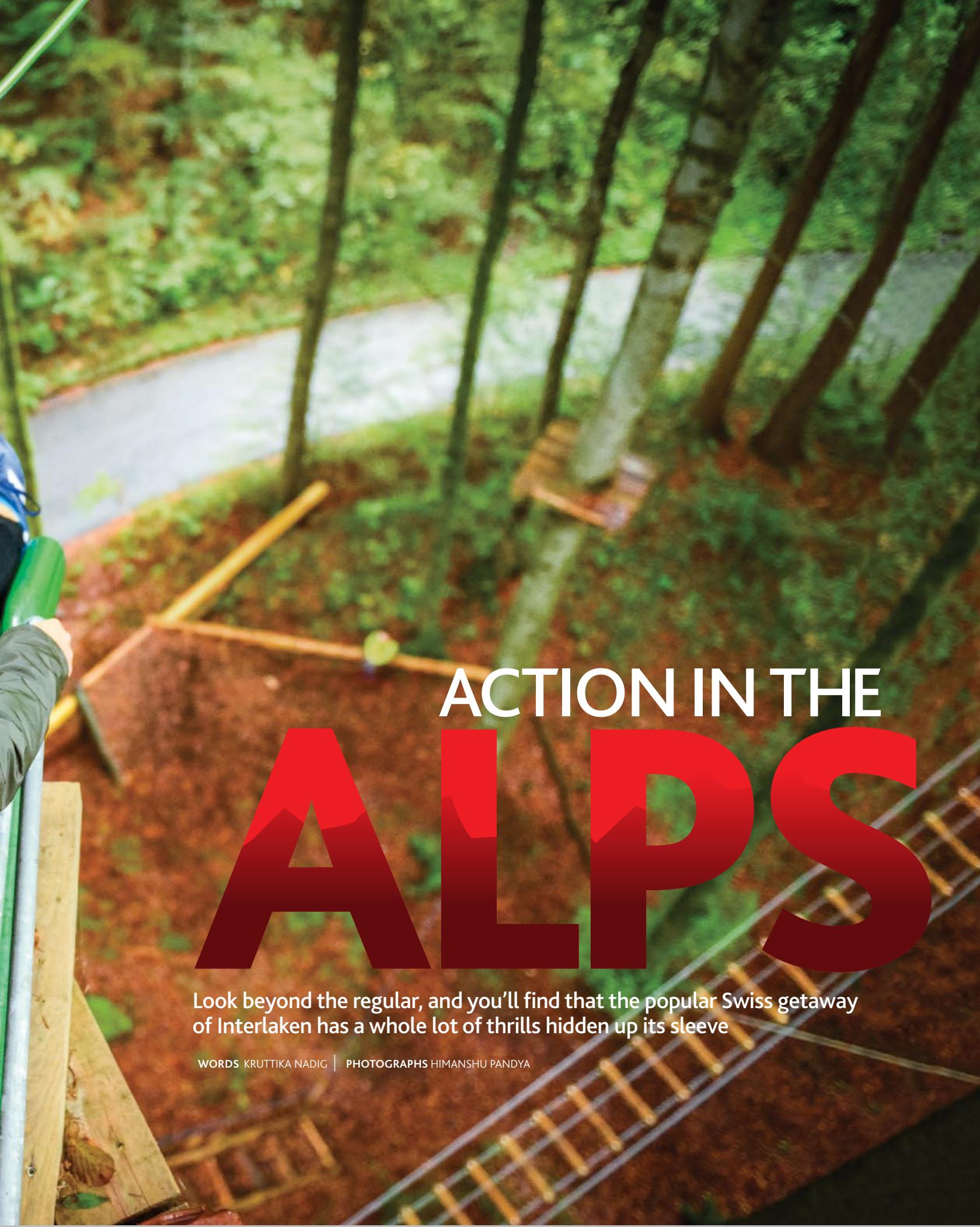
**PG 88** We've broken down **Goa**'s many attractions for all types of travellers | **PG 102** Discover the soul of **Portugal** through its heartwarming music, delish food and wine, and colourful history

Looking towards Wetterhorn in the Swiss Alps in our feature on Interlaken, pg xxx





**Tarzan, here I come!**  
An adventure-junkie all set  
to be catapulted off a tree  
at Interlaken's Seilpark



# ACTION IN THE ALPS

Look beyond the regular, and you'll find that the popular Swiss getaway of Interlaken has a whole lot of thrills hidden up its sleeve

WORDS KRUTTIKA NADIG | PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA



## “One, two, threeee!”

A 20-metre drop looks much further than it is from my narrow platform up in a Swiss tree. I’m standing here with a sturdy rope hooked to my back and five faces looking up at me expectantly. It’s just a tiny jump, I tell myself, there’s no way you can get hurt. My feet refuse to accept this sound logic, and I wonder why. On the way up to my arboreal perch, I had been imagining myself doing a perfect, graceful swan dive into the base-jumping hall of fame. Now I’m just yearning to get back on ground as soon as possible. There’s only one way to do it. I hear “One-Two-Three!” echoing for the fourth or fifth time, and plummet downwards.

Crowning Interlaken like a cheeky fringe, the forest of adventure that is Seilpark is worlds apart from the town’s glittering luxury-watch shops and vintage-car-studded promenade. I’m here on a mission to discover the “other” side of everyone’s favourite Swiss



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destination. That means no shopping, no fondue, and – gasp! – no Jungfrau. This is much easier said than done since the immense snow-covered peak is always in my line of vision. But shunning the dramatic cogwheel train ride up to the queen of the Bernese Alps, I instead ride a modest funicular up to Harder Kulm, Interlaken’s smaller and greener mountain. And there, among a bunch of locals in summer garb, under a red umbrella and over my first plate of hot *rösti*, I take in an extraordinary view of Jungfrau and its adoptive town wedged between two limpid glacial lakes.

Having visited the famous mountain on a previous trip, I can visualise its sun-washed ski slopes from my seat across the valley. Jungfrau and Harder Kulm share a funny relationship that reminds me of the Empire State Building and Top of the Rock in New York: both offer terrific views of the city, but the latter also has the advantage of having the former in its view! By not going to Jungfrau, I can spend more time looking at her and her snowy brethren from the other high and low points the Interlaken region has to offer. Points which I will soon zoom up, glide down, ride, hike, splash about and crash into, on a summer adventure that dodges past all the clichés you’ve heard about Switzerland. →

1. Harder Kulm’s Two Lakes Bridge thrusts you right over the valley

2. Underground streams gurgle through St Beatus Caves and gush out

3. A plate of *rösti* warms the wandering heart – and comes with toppings like tomatoes, apples or bacon

4. Horse-drawn carriages are a fun way to explore the older parts of Interlaken

5. A view of Hohematte, the landing field, from Hotel Metropole on Interlaken’s main street

6. A kitty dozing outside her home in sleepy Brienz

7. The Vertical Rush challenge in Seilpark is a hoot and a scream

## WATER ADVENTURES & VILLAGE WALKS

### Brienz Region

The 1890s were a significant decade for this resort town, when it was renamed from the dull Germanic Aarmuhle to the elegant Latin *inter-laken* (between lakes) as more posh tourists began to arrive. I'm told that the **Lakes Brienz and Thun** – named after the two charming towns flanking Interlaken – are so clean and weed-free that no fish can survive in them.

"Here, drink some," says my Jetboat driver Simon, dunking a cup into the water. We've just stopped for a breather after another dizzying 360° spin in his boat. It's Switzerland's first commercial **Jetboat** service, he yells over the noisy engine as we hurtle across Lake Brienz, squealing whenever a shock of cold water finds bare skin. Our boat skids to a frothy halt beside the palatial **Grandhotel Giessbach**, a 19th-century mansion saved from demolition by a Swiss ecologist and re-opened as a hotel. Tumbling beside it is a feisty 500m cascade called the **Giessbach**

1. Brienz's woodcarving industry leaves its mark on the town's signboards

2. Visitors to Ballenberg can meet a variety of Swiss farm animals including these friendly horses

3. Ballenberg's Homemade Shop sells everything from smoked sausages to chocolate and cheese

4. Gliders enjoy dramatic mountain views on their slow descent into town

5. Jetboat riders feel the wind in their hair as they race across the lake

6. Ballenberg's heritage houses showcase the traditional rural lifestyle

7. Each chalet on Brunngasse is adorned with wood carvings and flowers



**Falls.** Simon starts chattering about Sherlock Holmes's showdown with Moriarty at the more famous Reichenbach Falls, which, until now I didn't even know was a real waterfall, let alone that it's only 18km away. Slower cruise boats stop at Giessbach for those who fancy having lunch at the heritage hotel and hiking around the falls; we, however, have more spins to do, and end up soaked and laughing breathlessly in our Jetboat. But the cruises are undeniably the calmest way to get from Interlaken to Brienz or Thun, both of which turn out to be real finds.

Little **Brienz** has an unexpected feather in its cap – it's home to **Brunngasse**, which was once voted "the most beautiful street in Europe". Sure enough, the place is a bonanza of lace-curtained windows and colourful geraniums bursting with romance. I can't help comparing, and decide that this snug procession of wooden homes has a slight edge over Interlaken's scattered 400-year-old chalets. Etchings in the doorframes, hand-carved cows, and birds on the windowsills turn Brunngasse into a subtle advertisement for Brienz's woodcarving industry. The **Jobin Swiss Woodcarving Museum** is filled with examples of this local tradition, from cuckoo clocks to elegant abstract sculptures.

It's clear that old traditions are fondly regarded by the Swiss and are very much alive in these parts. At **Ballenberg**, an entire village has been put together to showcase Swiss crafts and cottage industries. Each of the 110 houses here was moved block-by-block from other districts, usually →



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to save it from being knocked down and replaced with a gas station, or similarly sad fates. Thatch and stone from the 17th century, shingles and panelling from the 19th century – the different regional architectural styles all rub shoulders and host a range of activities like bread-baking, saddle-making and sausage-smoking. It's impossible to walk through the entire village, or "open-air museum", as it's called, in a day. You're inevitably distracted by the regal horses, the weirdly woolly pigs or the temptingly plump hens running around in every direction. Or you stop to absorb some history and get carried away in conversation with your guide, who tells you that this 1617 house from Basel is made of limestone because the then-Bishop of Basel had banned wooden construction. It's alleged that he made his money from weapon-making and ensured all the wood was sent off to the forges to burn. Walking into each uniquely furnished house here is like walking into a new story.



1. Humorous sculptures add a fun twist to Brienz's lakeside promenade
2. You can spend a whole day exploring Ballenberg
3. Thun Castle looms above the town's feisty river and old wooden bridges



### Make it Happen

**JETBOAT INTERLAKEN:** 00-41-78-845-5699; [jetboat.ch](http://jetboat.ch); Jet Port, c/o Ländte - Am Quai, Bönigen; multiple departures between 10.30am and 5.30pm Apr - Oct; prior booking recommended; 75-minute shared jetboat ride from ₹ 6,675 adult, ₹ 4,700 child, kids over 5 years allowed, wetsuits provided

**INTERLAKEN HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE RIDE:** carriages available at the paragliders' landing field on Höheweg and at Interlaken Ost & West railway stations; 9am – sunset; from ₹ 2,880/ 45-minute ride for two, extra person: ₹ 720

**BRIENZ TOWN:** 20km from Interlaken, access by 30-minute train ride or 90-minute boat cruise starting from Interlaken Ost; both free for Swiss Pass holders; rail timetable and fares on [sbb.ch](http://sbb.ch); one-way train ride from ₹ 600; boat timetable and fares: [bls.ch](http://bls.ch); from ₹ 1,600 one-way

**JOBIN SWISS WOODCARVING MUSEUM:** 00-41-33-952-1317; [museum-holzbildhauer.ch](http://museum-holzbildhauer.ch) (German only); Hauptstrasse, 111, Brienz; 9am – 6pm May – Sept, timings vary by season, Nov & Jan closed; ticket: ₹ 350, child free

**GIESSBACH GRANDHOTEL & FALLS VISIT:** Lunch in style at this romantic heritage hotel perched next to a waterfall at the edge of Lake Brienz (00-41-33-952-2525; [giessbach.ch](http://giessbach.ch)); take the special *Giessbach boat cruise departing from Interlaken Ost*; [bls.ch](http://bls.ch); from ₹ 5,400/person with a three-course lunch, funicular ride and return boat trip with enough time to explore the falls).

**BALLENBERG EXCURSION:** Get a taste of rural Switzerland in the friendly company of bakers, artisans and well-fed farm animals – perfect for an active day out with the kids (00-41-33-952-1030; [ballenberg.ch](http://ballenberg.ch), Ballenberg Swiss Open Air Museum, Museumstrasse 131, Hofstetten bei Brienz). Club this with a visit to **BRIENZ** (take bus 151 from Brienz Bahnhof to Ballenberg – Museum; free for Swiss Pass holders, timetable on [sbb.ch](http://sbb.ch); from ₹ 250 one-way; museum timings: 10am – 5pm Apr – Oct; ticket: ₹ 1,500 adult, ₹ 750 child).

## HIGHS, HOLLOWES AND MEDIEVAL CASTLES

### *Thun Region*

Some of the prettiest sights I see here are unnamed and un-advertised, like Lake Thun's necklace of waterfront cottages and vineyards, or the old church walls smothered by curtains of ivy. **Sigriswil Panorama Bridge** on the **Lake Thun Hiking Trail** is similarly obscure, as it's mostly only local hikers who come up into these hills. Crossing the 340m-long pedestrian suspension bridge is like taking a drunken driving test; it wobbles unsettlingly as I accept (and fail) my guide Karen's challenge of walking in a straight line on a single metal plank. Sigriswil is a new attraction on what's already a pleasant trail, winding past sleepy hamlets and slopes that transform from fresh green in summer to an unbroken white in winter. →



The cutely-named **Gummi Gorge** channels a glacial trickle under the bridge and out into Lake Thun. Draped in vapours at the bottom of the valley, Interlaken's other lake is as enigmatic as the jester who serves as Thun's mascot. Locals say a cheeky jester in the court of Charles the Bold had mocked Thun's soldiers by calling them lazy. He was captured during the Burgundian Wars in 1476, and paraded about the medieval town with a devil's mask on his face, and the inglorious moniker "Fulehung" (lazy dog) forever stuck to him.

I've missed the annual **Fulehung Festival**, but Thun still looks festive. Its streets and squares are strung with flags depicting the bear, symbol of the Bern region, behind which lies another intriguing legend. It's said that Bern's founder Duke Berthold V vowed to name his city after the first animal hunted by his men in the nearby jungle. "Thankfully," says Karen, "It was a big, strong bear, and not a silly rabbit or something."

**Thun Town** is palpably ancient and genteel. Its 800-year-old castle – built by the powerful Zähringen family of Germany to which the Duke belonged – watches over the town from four windswept towers. "It's like a mini-Bern," says Karen, referring to the antique buildings around town and covered shopping arcades lining **Obere Hauptgasse**, the fashionable main street. The sight of all those gorgeous clothes and shoes buried under pastel-coloured façades is hypnotic, but alas, I have a bus to catch. A subterranean world of stalactites and stalagmites awaits me. It's all very dramatic, yet, as I march through the icy bowels of **St Beatus Caves** a couple of hours later, I catch myself wishing I'd stayed in sunny Thun a while longer. →



1. This lion has an axe to grind
2. The St Beatus Caves are home to a medieval dragon-slaying legend
3. Ancient spires and clock towers remind you of Thun's medieval past
4. It takes some nerve to cross Sigriswil's swaying Panorama Bridge
5. Lake Thun as seen from the mountain hamlet of Sigriswil
6. The town's squares and street corners are cooled by fountains you can drink out of
7. A vintage Citroen Dolly on Thun's main shopping street

### Make it Happen

**THUN TOWN VISIT:** 00-41-33-225-9000; [thunersee.ch](http://thunersee.ch); Thun Tourism, Bahnhof Thun; train from ₹1,100 one-way, timetable on [sbb.ch/en](http://sbb.ch/en); or, take the cruise boat from Interlaken West; from ₹2,400 one-way, timetable on [bls.ch](http://bls.ch), both free for Swiss Pass holders

**THUN CASTLE MUSEUM:** Wander through a 12th-century castle full of interesting art and artefacts from the region (00-41-33-223-2001; [schlossthun.ch](http://schlossthun.ch) [German only]; [Schlossmuseum Thun](http://Schlossmuseum.Thun), Schlossberg 1; 10am–5pm Apr–Oct, timings vary by season; ₹700).

**SIGRISWIL PANORAMA BRIDGE:** [brueckenweg.ch](http://brueckenweg.ch); ₹550; club this with a visit to THUN (take the bus from Thun Bahnhof to Sigriswil Dorf and then walk two minutes till the bridge, free for Swiss Pass holders, timetable on [sbb.ch](http://sbb.ch), from ₹500 one-way).

**ST BEATUS CAVES:** If you like exploring spooky places, this underground cavern in which a legendary saint slayed a dragon is just for you (00-41-33-841-1643; [beatushohlen.ch](http://beatushohlen.ch); [Beatushöhle-Genossenschaft](http://Beatushöhle-Genossenschaft); 9.30am–5pm Mar–Oct; ₹1,200). Club this with a visit to THUN (take bus 21 from Thun Bahnhof to Beatushohlen; timetable on [sbb.ch/en](http://sbb.ch/en)).



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## EXTREME INTERLAKEN

Interlaken was a serene place till about a decade ago, which is when adrenaline junkies began dropping out of its sky, accompanied by joyful shouts and frantic waving at anybody who chanced to look up. Having begun my stay here with a staid horse-carriage tour, I'm itching to test the town's new claim of being an adventure destination. **Seilpark Interlaken**'s four-part 'Vertical Rush' challenge sounds like child's play when I first hear about it. Jumping and swinging off trees? Sure, I can be Tarzan for a day. That doesn't stop me from shaking uncontrollably on the 20-m-high tightrope inside Seilpark, ironically meant to dispel your fear of heights before you move on to the BASE jump and Giant Swing. All the calm, logical thoughts I had had on the ground are deserting me. I make it to the end of the High Line and embrace the tree passionately before tiptoeing back, each step feeling like a huge achievement.

The jump, which has me frozen in doubt for a good five minutes, lasts only a few seconds. I'm still pumping with triumph when the pulley hoists me up again for the third and craziest feat – the Giant Swing. Sitting on the edge of the platform, with two taut ropes connecting me to two faraway

1. Deep-fried perch fillets with homemade tartare sauce at the Berggasthaus First restaurant in Grindelwald
2. A thrill-seeker zooms off on the Grindelwald First Flyer zip-line
3. Hang-gliding over Interlaken is stunning, invigorating, and feels incredibly safe
4. Seilpark has a fun mix of easy and hair-raising treetop challenges
5. Trottibikes let you explore Grindelwald's countryside at your own pace



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trees, I fight their tension for as long as I can. But the combined forces of nature, physics, and the devious designers of Seilpark throw me forward into a weightless rapture of back-and-forth freefalling, at a racy 75 kmph. By the end of it, I get why the girl who went before me said this was "So much worse!" between spurts of laughter. After this, the Speed Line (zip-wire) journey back to our car feels like a leisurely stroll in the park.

The next dare on my list is a tandem **hang-gliding** flight with **Bumblebee**, which is less intimidating but much grander than monkeying around in the treetops. I literally get to put up my feet up and glide like a bird while my pilot swoops and swerves over the Interlaken valley. Seen from up here, it's very much your staple Indian honeymooners' destination. But when the pilot offers me steering control and we start to bounce gently against the wind, I enter a blissful plane that calls to all the hoodie-clad thrill chasers out there. →

### Make it Happen

**VERTICAL RUSH AT SEILPARK INTERLAKEN:** 00-41-33-826-7719; [seilpark-interlaken.ch](http://seilpark-interlaken.ch); Outdoor Interlaken AG, Seilpark, Wagnerstrasse; timings vary; 4-challenge Vertical Rush from ₹ 6,600, minimum age 10 years; other activities from ₹ 2,500  
**HANG-GLIDING WITH BUMBLEBEE:** 00-41-79-454-3464; [fly-bumblebee.com](http://fly-bumblebee.com); Eyacher, 1; 8am – 5.30pm; 15-minute tandem flight from ₹ 15,400; prior booking recommended



## COUNTRY ADVENTURE

## Grindelwald Region

After giving away my erratic red scooter at the age of nine, I never thought I'd set foot on such a vehicle again. A remote cable-car station in the Alps is the last place where you'd expect to rediscover your childhood delights. So when I arrive at **Grindelwald** and see that **trotti bikes** are just bigger and sleeker versions of those classic scooters, it's already clear that this is going to be one riot of a ride. And what could be a better setting than a Swiss mountain hamlet with its ribbon-like roads running past grassy slopes and farmyards? It takes me a minute to orient myself to the speedy blue scooter after all these years; but, like cycling and swimming, you never forget: only the first kick-off is a bit tricky. Standing upright with the wind whipping my face (those trotti bikes can really cruise!) and jangling cowbells greeting me around the corners, this is as footloose as I can get in Switzerland.

Grindelwald is the ideal place for taking off on your own and blending into the countryside. I don't have enough time to hike to the First peak, but the glacier-facing **First Flyer zip-line** is right here and will be the perfect explosive finale to an exhilarating trip. I'm strapped snugly into

1. Swiss cows often look like they're dressed for a party

2. The terrace at Berggasthaus First overlooks the Upper Grindelwald and Kleine Scheidegg glaciers



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an airborne chair when the operator tells me to kick off. This time, there's no hesitation, my capers on land and water have readied me for the 2,480ft-long and 675ft-high zip-line ride. Forty high-velocity seconds later, I'm back on the hill with a wide green landscape unfolding on all sides and inviting me to explore it. A country walk seems like an appealing way to cool down after all the excitement. The past few days have been a whirlwind of flying limbs and rapid heartbeats, but here, in Grindelwald, the meadows are resolutely peaceful. My aimless stroll brings me face to face with some more healthy spotted cows, lying on their bellies with their massive decorative bells glinting in the light. They watch me calmly as I gape at their size and sheen. I wish I could give one of them a hug, but maybe that would be *too* adventurous. 

## Make it Happen

**GRINDELWALD FIRST FLYER:** 00-41-33-828-7233; [ziprider.com/rides/grindelwald/](http://ziprider.com/rides/grindelwald/); [jungfrau.ch/nc/en/sommer/tourism/destinations/grindelwald-first/offers/#first-fun-package\\_201](http://jungfrau.ch/nc/en/sommer/tourism/destinations/grindelwald-first/offers/#first-fun-package_201); timings vary; May – Oct; First Flyer package with Rail and Trottibike from ₹5,300, First Flyer from ₹1,800

**GRINDELWALD TROTTIBIKE:** 00-41-33-828-7711; [grindelwald.ch/15/2/17/en/holidays/summer/adventure\\_and\\_fun/Grindelwald/Trottibike\\_Adventure](http://grindelwald.ch/15/2/17/en/holidays/summer/adventure_and_fun/Grindelwald/Trottibike_Adventure); [shop.jungfrau.ch/en/trottibike-abenteuerbort](http://shop.jungfrau.ch/en/trottibike-abenteuerbort); Firstbahn AG, Dorfstrasse, 187, Grindelwald; mid-May – mid-Oct; Trottibikes available at Bort funicular station near the First Flyer end point; rental with helmet: ₹2,000/ day

# Make it Happen: Adventure in Interlaken

## Essentials

### → BEST TIME TO VISIT

The summer months from June to September are cheerful, sunny and great for outdoor capers, but also busy. Springtime (Apr–Jun) might be colder, but is also quieter. Temperatures dip on the mountain tops, but it's a pleasant kind of chill.

### → GETTING THERE

We flew with Swiss Air ([swissair.com](http://swissair.com)), which plies non-stop to Zürich from New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 49,000) and Mumbai (from ₹ 44,600). You can also fly Emirates, Air India, Lufthansa, Qatar Airways, Oman Air and KLM Royal Dutch, among others (from ₹ 36,000). Take the train from Zürich HB to Interlaken Ost (one-way fares from ₹ 4600, free for Swiss Pass holders).

### → GETTING AROUND

Switzerland has an excellent public transport system and the easiest way to get around is with the [Swiss Travel Pass](http://swisstravelpass.ch). The pass gives you unlimited free travel on consecutive days on trains, buses, and scenic boats, various local trams and buses plus free admission to hundreds of museums ([swiss-pass.ch](http://swiss-pass.ch); from ₹ 14,000/ three days). Find inter-city timetables and other info at [sbb.ch/en](http://sbb.ch/en).

### → VISA

The Embassy of Switzerland in India issues Schengen visas for tourists ([eda.admin.ch/countries/india/en/home.html](http://eda.admin.ch/countries/india/en/home.html); visa fee: ₹ 4,300/ single entry; at least five working days to process).

### → EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Bern: [indembassybern.ch](http://indembassybern.ch)

### → CURRENCY

Swiss Franc (CHF) 1 = ₹ 66

### → FURTHER READING

Try Lonely Planet's *Switzerland and Discover Switzerland* guides. The official websites, [interlaken.ch](http://interlaken.ch) and [myswitzerland.com](http://myswitzerland.com), are also great resources.

### → VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Announced by a big tricolour flag, India Village serves everything from meaty biryanis to a Jain *thali* (00-41-33-821-2150; [india-village.net](http://india-village.net); Brienzstrasse, 38 – 42; mains from ₹ 1,000).

## ESSENTIAL INTERLAKEN EXPERIENCES

### Jungfrau

You haven't seen the Swiss Alps until you've ascended the 3454m-tall, highly-celebrated Mount Jungfrau. Its perennially-white summit is home to Europe's highest railway station, reached easily and unforgettable by a cogwheel train from Kleine Scheidegg above Interlaken. Visitors can look head-on at mounts Eiger and Mönch that form the "big three" of mountaineering along with Jungfrau. The 'Top of Europe', as it's called, offers fabulous views of the Aletsch Glacier – Europe's largest – and is a great place at which to start a snowball fight. This grand panorama gets even better from the glass-walled Sphinx Observation Terrace 117m above. Jungfrau also boasts of scenic hiking trails, an Ice Palace full of bird and animal sculptures, fine slopes for winter skiing, and a Bollywood-themed restaurant to boot ([jungfrau.ch/en](http://jungfrau.ch/en)).

### Harder Kulm

Interlaken's home mountain, Harder Kulm provides a bird's-eye view of its pretty green valley and blue lakes. You can access it by cable car or climb up to its 1322m-high peak through a forest trail, beginning near a fenced game park containing majestically-horned ibex, an Alpine wild goat. The mountain-top Panorama Restaurant is a pleasant lunch spot, with a breezy open terrace and bright fluttering umbrellas. Its offerings include the mildly-thrilling Two Lakes Bridge, a jutting deck that overlooks Lakes Brienz and Thun lying below on either side of Interlaken; as well as traditional Swiss cuisine involving copious amounts of cheese. Would-be explorers can take off on the paths winding away from here towards neighbouring mountains. With the Bernese Alps stretched out on the horizon and hearty food and drink being served on its tables, Harder Kulm's a favourite with locals and visitors alike ([jungfrau.ch/en](http://jungfrau.ch/en)).

### Schynige Platte

A one-of-a-kind day-trip from Interlaken, Schynige Platte introduces you to a world of over 600 varieties of native plants and flowers such as snowbells, gentians and edelweiss, in its Botanical Alpine Garden that opens every summer. The colourful blooms are a refreshing sight against the backdrop of white peaks. A 122-year-old cogwheel train ferries you up to this trekking hotspot at a height of 2,076m, crowned by an equally old and charming hotel built in 1899. Bask on its spacious sun-terrace facing the high white peaks behind Lake Brienz; otherwise set off on the easy 'Panorama' trek to Loucherhorn or the more challenging one to Faulhorn and Grindelwald First.



## INTERLAKEN

The plateau lets you access some of the best trails and views in the region. If you're here in July or August, sign up for one of the moonlight hikes and make some ethereal memories in the mountains ([jungfrau.ch/en](http://jungfrau.ch/en)).

### Piz Gloria

As if being Europe's first revolving restaurant wasn't enough, Piz Gloria went and topped the feat by being featured in the 1969 James Bond flick *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. The panoramic eatery sits on the Schilthorn summit at a height of 2,970m, serves a Sky Fall Fillet of Beef as well as the classic Bond martini, and ensures that even the laziest diners get a 360° view through an hour-long meal. Along with the longest aerial cableway in the Alps, Piz Gloria offers stunning vistas spanning from Jungfrau, Eiger and Mönch to the Vosges Mountains in France and the Black Forest region of Germany. The little village of Murren below the summit is a hub for summer walks and winter sports. It lies within easy hiking distance of the thunderous Trümmelbach Falls, which bring Jungfrau's glacial melt down at up to 20,000 litres of water per second ([schilthorn.ch/en](http://schilthorn.ch/en)).

### Höheweg

Höheweg is Interlaken's cobblestoned main street filled with glittering shop windows and smart horse-drawn carriages. No tour of the town is complete without a walk past its elegant buildings led by the Victoria Hotel Jungfrau and the trendy Kursaal casino. You're guaranteed to bring home something from Höheweg – a bag of goodies from its chocolate boutiques or postcards from its many souvenir shops,

if not a swanky Swiss wristwatch. Strolling and people-watching on the Höheweg is a classic way to experience the town's glamorous holiday spirit. Colourful gliders float down from the sky to the landing field beside the street all day, and vintage cars are delightfully common. There's ample choice for eating and drinking on the Höheweg as well, with everything from bars and restaurants to fast food and ice-cream carts lined up to tempt passers-by. The street's impressively close view of Jungfrau is just the cherry on top ([interlaken.ch/en](http://interlaken.ch/en)).

### WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel Metropole:** Interlaken's tallest hotel lords over the main street and faces Mount Jungfrau across the paragliders' landing field (00-41-33-828-6666; [metropole-interlaken.ch](http://metropole-interlaken.ch), [mail@metropole-interlaken.ch](mailto:mail@metropole-interlaken.ch); Höheweg, 37; from ₹ 6800).

### WHAT TO EAT

*Rösti* (hash brown potatoes) is practically the national comfort food. Grab the crispy bacon-and-cheese version at the panoramic restaurant atop Harder Kulm (00-41-33-828-7311; [jungfrau.ch/en/sommer/tourism/destinations/harder-kulm/](http://jungfrau.ch/en/sommer/tourism/destinations/harder-kulm/); restaurant timings: 9.30am – 9.30pm Mon – Sat, 8.30am – 9.15pm Sun; access by Harder Kulm funicular near Interlaken Ost railway station, funicular return trip: ₹ 1,075 for Swiss Pass holders; a generous plate of *rösti* costs ₹ 1,600).

### WHAT TO PACK

A light jacket, walking shoes and an umbrella for the occasional shower



THE PERFECT TRIP

# Thailand's Islands

From white beaches, towering cliffs and sea gypsies to jungles and fiery food, take a voyage around some of Thailand's most unforgettable islands

WORDS OLIVER BERRY | PHOTOGRAPHS CATHERINE SUTHERLAND

The pristine bay of Ao Nai on the island of Koh Phi-Phi Don

Facing page:

1. Learn to create Thai specialties such as spicy tom yum soup on Koh Lanta

2. The island of Koh Yao Nai is an ideal place at which to hide away

3. Limestone cliffs dominate the landscape of Ao Phang-Nga

4. The Surin Islands are home to nomadic Moken people, who are handicraft experts



# Your trip mapped out

Learn the secrets of Thai food, find caves, lagoons and hidden islands, hear the folk tales of a nomadic tribe, and lose the crowds on white-sand beaches and in tropical forests

## At a glance

i

### YOUR DESTINATION

**Capital:** Bangkok  
**How far away is it?**  
Flights from Mumbai and New Delhi take about four hours to get to Bangkok; from there, it's a further hour-and-a-half to Phuket, your base

**Currency:** Thai Baht (THB 1 = ₹ 1.89)  
**Languages spoken:** Thai, English

**YOUR TRIP**  
**Cost:** \$\$\$\$\$  
**Ideal number of days:** 14 days  
**Visa:** on arrival

**When to go:** November – April  
**Who it's good for:** couples, more adventurous travellers – Indian food might not always be available

**Highlights:** the Moken people of Surin Island; kayaking through the hidden lagoons of Ao Phang-

Nga; cooking on Koh Lanta

### KEY PHRASES (PHONETICALLY):

**Hello:** Sawadee  
**Thank you:** Khop kun  
**Where's the toilet?:** Hong naam yuu tii nai?

### 1 KOHYAO NOI

Start your journey on this tropical forested island, where mass-tourism and overdevelopment have been happily kept at bay.

### 2 AO PHANG-NGA

The 40 or so karst islets of Ao Phang-Nga, or Phang-Nga bay, are a maze of lagoons and caves, like an adventure playground for the inquisitive.

### 3 SURIN ISLANDS

The ancient, nomadic Moken people – 'sea gypsies' – have made this part of Thailand, including the village of Ban Moken, their home.

### 4 KOH PHI-PHI

Look past the famous and overcrowded Ao Maya, and you'll find otherworldly coastal scenery and little-known beach spots.

### 5 KOH LANTA

A love of sweet, fiery food is close to the heart of Thailand's islanders – and a local cookery school can teach you how to eat the traditional Thai way.





1

2

## 1 KOH YAO NOI

### Best for escape

**DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 1–3**

FERRIES RUN SEVERAL TIMES A DAY TO KOH YAO NOI FROM BANG RONG PIER, SITUATED AT THE NORTHERN END OF PHUKET. THE JOURNEY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT AN HOUR

The first ferry of the day has just docked at Koh Yao Noi ('Little Long Island') and it seems like half the island has turned out to greet it. Sinewy men, cigarettes dangling from their mouths, unload boxes of supplies into waiting trucks, while locals greet their families and clamber into one of the spluttering *tuk-tuks* lined up alongside the quay. Apart from a couple of shacks lodged beside the harbour, there doesn't seem to be another building – or another tourist – anywhere in sight.

In many ways, Koh Yao Noi has been trapped in time. The island – 12km long, more than 9km wide and home to around 4,000 people – has consciously resisted the development that has run rampant through many of Thailand's islands. Empty beaches fringe the shoreline, hemmed in by cliffs and coconut trees. Much of the land is still covered by tropical forest. Water buffalo and wild cockerels roam among the palms and banyans, while farmers dry sheets of freshly tapped rubber under the trees.

"This is how Thailand's islands used to be," explains Su Potpradit, who manages the development of sustainable tourism on Koh Yao Noi. "The whole place is really like one big family. Everyone knows

everyone else, and we all look after each other."

In many ways, the island owes its survival to its traditional democratic structure. Koh Yao Noi is governed by a group of ancestral elders – known as *pu yai ban* – and each of the seven districts has an equal say in major decisions that would affect the wider island.

Its strong sense of community and laid-back pace of life also make it an ideal place at which to escape. There are just a few small resorts, mostly dotted around the southern cape. The rest of the accommodation is in homestays, where guests are invited to join in with everyday life and experience the island through local eyes.

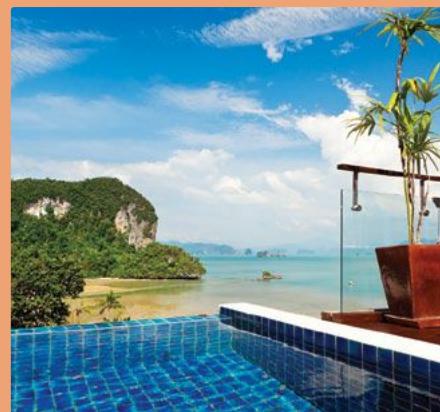
"We've seen the way the other islands have changed over the years," Su says, as she strolls through the streets of the main village, "and we've decided that we don't want that here. We want to hold on to what makes our island special – our culture, our history, our way of life."

She ducks into a market stall, where local women are dyeing sarongs in a rainbow of tropical colours. On the street, mopeds clatter past and children wave from the backs of pick-up trucks, while, in the fields beyond the village, evening shadows fall across the rice paddies and rubber trees. →

**1. Koh Yao Noi's east coast looks towards the coastline of Krabi Province**

**2. Families on mopeds riding home from school**

## Essentials



### WHERE TO STAY

**Koh Yao Noi Homestay Club:** The homestay accommodation is basic, but the experience of staying with a family is unique. Koh Yao Noi Homestay Club has a number of eco-friendly rental options (00-66-76-597-409; [koh-yao-noi-eco-tourism-club.com](http://koh-yao-noi-eco-tourism-club.com); *from ₹ 600*).

**Paradise Koh Yao:** In the north-east of the island, Paradise Koh Yao resort is the best escape on Koh Yao Noi. Smart bungalows overlook a private beach. Other highlights include a restaurant where you can feel the sand between your toes (00-66-76-584-450; [theparadise.biz](http://theparadise.biz); 24, Moo 4; *from ₹ 17,600 with breakfast*).

### WHERE TO EAT

French flair and Thai flavours combine at the village restaurant **Je t'Aime**, where you can down proper *pastis* before tucking into Thai-spiced lobster or a classic *massaman* curry (00-66-76-597-495; 21/1, Moo 1; *from ₹ 500*).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

[koyaoislands.com](http://koyaoislands.com)



1. Limestone stalactites hanging over the Andaman Sea
2. A jungle vine
3. Local guide Bao Thinkohyao
4. The prow of a longtail boat entering a *hong*, or enclosed lagoon

## 2 AO PHANG-NGA

### Best for exploring

**DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 4–5**

AO PHANG-NGA LIES JUST TO THE NORTH OF KOH YAO NOI, AND IS EASILY REACHABLE BY LONGTAIL BOAT OR SPEEDBOAT

A rosy-red sun is rising above the bay of Ao Phang-Nga. As the longtail boat skips over the waves, seabirds skim low through the spray kicked up by the boat's buzzing motor, and patches of mist drift across the prow. Ahead, a chain of spiky islands – shrouded in dense foliage and spidery clouds –

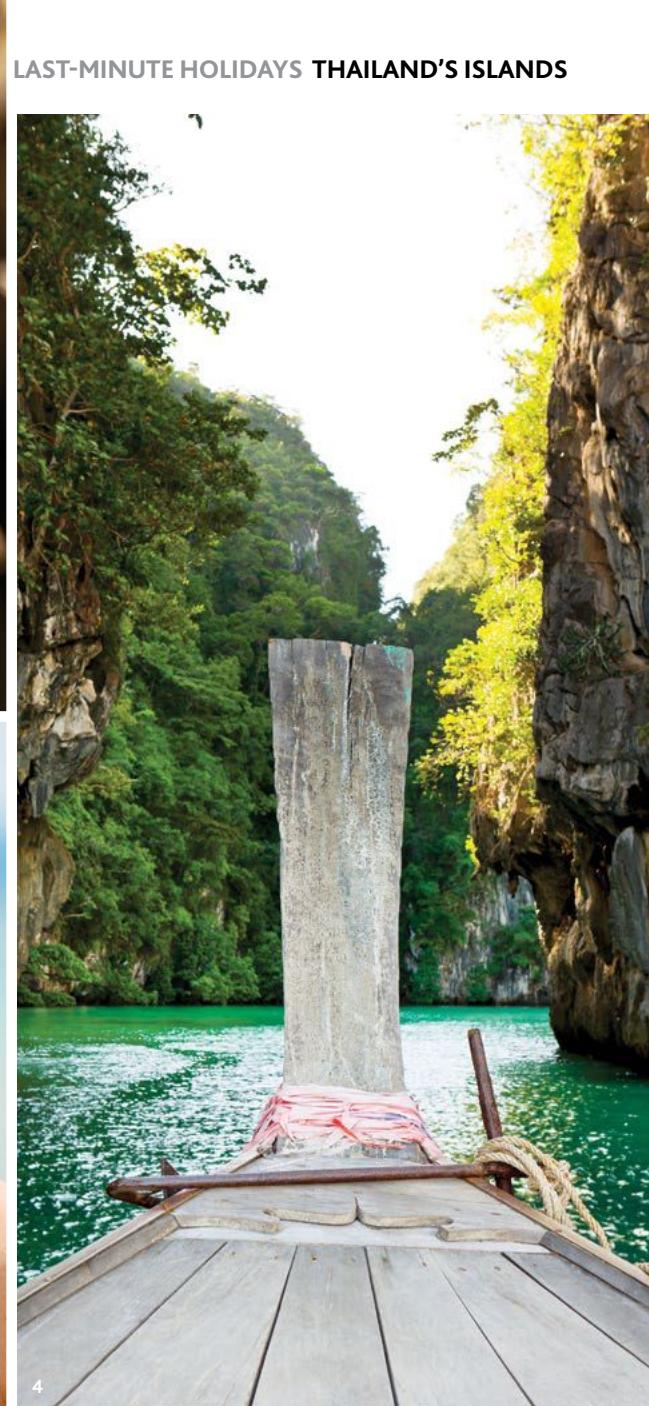
rises from the ocean. It looks like something out of *Jurassic Park*.

Covering 388sqkm between the busy Phuket and the coastal province of Krabi, Ao Phang-Nga is one of Thailand's largest marine reserves. Several millennia ago, the bay was a huge open floodplain, but rising sea levels and geological shifts submerged the land and created a network of 40-odd islands, for which the bay is now famous.

Formed of porous limestone formations known as karsts, Phang-Nga's islands have been sculpted into myriad shapes through the centuries. Many are riddled with deep tunnels and subterranean caverns that plummet deep beneath the ocean's surface.

Others are sealed off by sheer, black 300m-high cliffs. The most beautiful have *hongs* – hidden lagoons enclosed by rock walls – that are often only accessible for a few hours a day at low tide. With so much geological drama on show, the bay has frequently been used as a cinematic backdrop – most notably in the 1974 James Bond movie *The Man with the Golden Gun*, when the rocky pinnacle of Koh Tapu doubled as the site of baddie Scaramanga's lair.

Ao Phang-Nga can easily be reached on a day-trip from Phuket, but the more secret islands can only be explored by kayak – ideally at dawn or dusk, when the big tourist boats are nowhere to be seen.



Bao Thinkohyao is a local guide who was born on the island of Koh Yao Yai. He knows the bay's geography like the back of his hand and can navigate his way through the maze of caves, lagoons and mangrove swamps without ever needing to refer to a map or compass. "I feel at home on these islands," he says. "I've been exploring them since I was a boy. To me, they're like old friends."

As his boat drifts through a hidden lagoon on the uninhabited island of Koh Hong, he cocks his head to listen to a family of macaques chattering among the mangroves. From the island's jungle interior, a fish eagle rises from the canopy, beating its wings a few times before disappearing into a terracotta sky. →

## Essentials

### WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

**Elixir Resort:** Ao Phang-Nga can be visited on day-trips from Phuket or Krabi, but it's easier to base yourself on a nearby island. The Elixir Resort on Koh Yao Yai has jungle bungalows – from elegant one-room lodges to multi-room villas with private pools. The resort also has the island's best restaurant, where barbecued seafood is a specialty (00-66-87-808-3838; [elixirresort.com](http://elixirresort.com); 99, Moo 3; from ₹15,000 with breakfast).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Bao Thinkohyao's tour of Ao Phang-Nga can be booked in advance via email (00-66-87-091-2008; [sunrise\\_kohyao@hotmail.com](mailto:sunrise_kohyao@hotmail.com); ₹5,700 with park fee, lunch and kayak equipment).





The Moken village of Ao Bon

Facing page:

1. Salaman, a Moken elder
2. Rattan handicrafts are widely available
3. Traditional stilt huts thatched with pandanus leaves
4. A derelict *kabang* (houseboat)
5. Moken children

Sometimes, the Moken's legends can warn them of unexpected dangers. An ancient tale told of a big wave, 'the *laboon*', that would recede before 'eating people' – signs that were heeded prior to the 2004 tsunami, when the Moken immediately recognised the need to escape to higher ground. Today, the Moken's traditions often place them at odds with the modern world. Most have no fixed nationality, and find it difficult to access education and healthcare, while their fishing practices can conflict with environmental conservation laws. Yet, there are positives – new initiatives are helping them take advantage of the Surin Islands' growing popularity by selling handicrafts, running cultural tours and leading coral reef snorkelling expeditions. Salaman is reassuringly sanguine about the future. "The Moken are a very old people," he says. "We have faced many challenges. We have to learn how to be part of the modern world, but we must remember who we are, too." →

## 3 SURIN ISLANDS

### Best for culture

**DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 6 – 7**

BOATS TO THE SURIN ISLANDS DEPART FROM KHURABURI, 185KM NORTH OF PHUKET BY BUS. THE JOURNEY TO THE ISLANDS TAKES ABOUT 90 MINUTES BY SPEEDBOAT

It's early morning, and the smell of sea salt and wood smoke hangs heavy in the air. Under the jungle canopy, a few men prepare a fresh batch of charcoal for the village over a smouldering pyre. Nearby, women weave strips of dried rattan (a type of palm) into baskets, mats and bracelets, while children chase each other across the sand and turn somersaults in the fizzing surf.

"Welcome to Ban Moken," announces Salaman, a silver-haired Moken elder in baggy Bermuda shorts, whose sprightly demeanour belies his advanced years. "It is an honour to have you in our village. We are very happy to have you here." His face breaks out into a toothy grin as he strides along the shoreline, passing thatch-topped huts perched on bamboo stilts and wooden boats bobbing in the swell. This village is home to one of the last communities of Moken in Thailand. Known elsewhere as *chow lair* – or sea gypsies

– these ancient nomadic people are believed to have been voyaging along the coastline of Southeast Asia for several thousand years.

Traditionally, the Moken are hunter-gatherers, spending much of the year fishing from covered boats known as *kabangs*, only returning to land to collect fresh water or seek refuge from seasonal monsoons. Like many aboriginal people, they share an intimate connection with the environment. They are expert swimmers, and can hold their breath for several minutes at a time: watching the Moken children glide among the islands' submarine canyons and coral gardens, they seem just as at home underwater as they are above the surface.

The Moken possess many fables and folk tales that help them make use of the natural world. Walking along the jungle trails on the island of Koh Surin Tai, they recount uses for practically every plant they pass – food, medicines, tools and building materials. One of the guides chops down a huge leaf from a pandanus tree with a machete and demonstrates some of its uses. Cut into strips, it can be plaited into cord, bound into rope or woven for huts and cabins. As he works, the calls of hornbills echo through the forest, and colonies of fruit bats flap among the banyans and teak trees.

## Essentials



### WHERE TO STAY

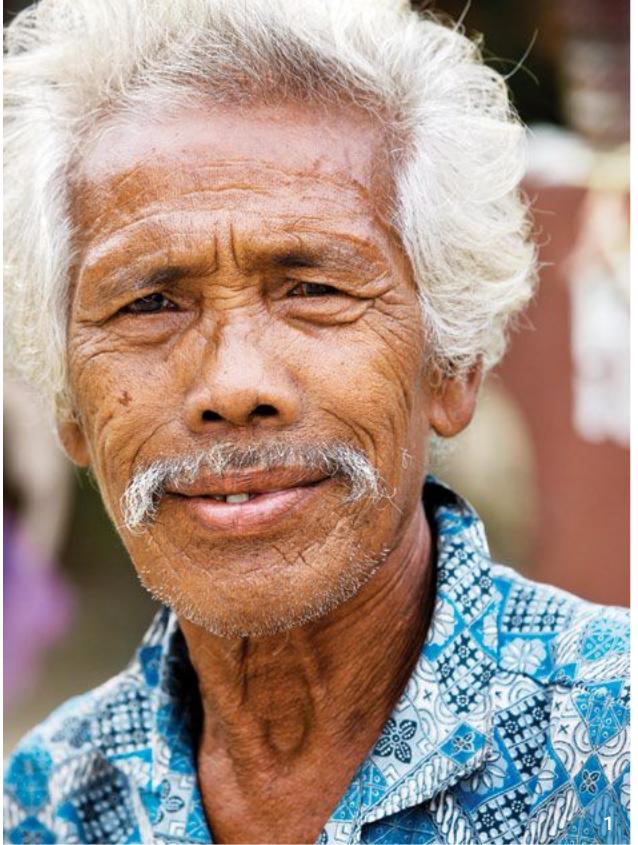
**Andaman Discoveries:** Community-based Andaman Discoveries has been instrumental in developing eco-tourism initiatives with the Moken people. Its tour to the Surin Islands includes boat transfers, village visits and snorkelling tours with Moken guides, as well as camping and bungalow stays on a nearby island ([andamandiscoveries.com/island-tour-koh-surin.php](http://andamandiscoveries.com/island-tour-koh-surin.php); two-day tours from ₹ 21,500 with tented accommodation).

### WHERE TO EAT

Practically the only place to eat is at the main national park campsite on Koh Surin Nuea, where a café serves set Thai menus – but no alcohol, since it's banned in the park (00-66-76-421-365; mains from ₹ 400).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

[surin-islands.com](http://surin-islands.com)





## 4 KOH PHI-PHI

### Best for beaches

**DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 8 – 9**

SEVERAL BOATS RUN DIRECT EVERY DAY FROM PHUKET TO KOH PHI-PHI – THE JOURNEY TAKES AROUND TWO HOURS

If there's one thing that Thailand's islands are famous for, it's the beaches – and they don't get any more famous than the ones on Koh Phi-Phi. The archipelago is home to some of the country's most impressive coastal scenery, not to mention some of its whitest stretches of sand.

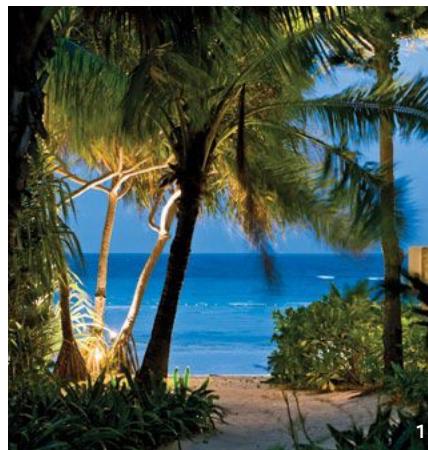
From the west, the main island of Koh Phi-Phi Don juts from the horizon like a wolf's tooth, its craggy peaks and inky cliffs rising sheer from the ocean waves. The island's east coast presents a much gentler picture – a string of white bays where resorts hide among groves of palm and pandanus, and unbroken views stretch out across the Andaman Sea.

"Phi-Phi is an island of surprises," says Sangsit 'Top' Sriwarin, who was born on the mainland near the city of Pattaya but now works here as a diving instructor. "The landscape is so varied – we have mountains, beaches, caves, cliffs and coral reefs. Sometimes, I can't believe it's actually a real place," he laughs.

There's certainly something otherworldly about Phi-Phi's improbably jagged geography. The second-largest island, Koh Phi-Phi Leh, is even more dramatic than its sister island. Ringed by coal-black cliffs and massive towers of rock, it's home to one of Thailand's most celebrated beaches – the glittering arc of Ao Maya, made famous by Danny Boyle's big-screen version of Alex Garland's 1996 novel *The Beach*. Once a closely-guarded secret known only to a chosen few, the bay now becomes busy with snorkellers and day-trippers almost as soon as the sun comes up.

Phi-Phi's best-known beaches may be firmly on the tourist radar, but seclusion is never more than a boat ride away. By longtail boat, it is still possible to uncover quiet spots where the crowds rarely venture – from the magnificent lagoon of Pilah to the remote atolls of Koh Mai Phai and Koh Yung, where the teal-blue waters teem with lionfish, leopard sharks and hawksbill turtles.

"I love the simplicity of life here," Top says. "You can feel your worries melting away. I've been to many different islands, but, for me, this is the only one that feels like home." He looks out along the powdery curve of Hat Laem Thong Bay, as the evening sun melts into a sea the colour of butterscotch and torches flicker under the palms. →

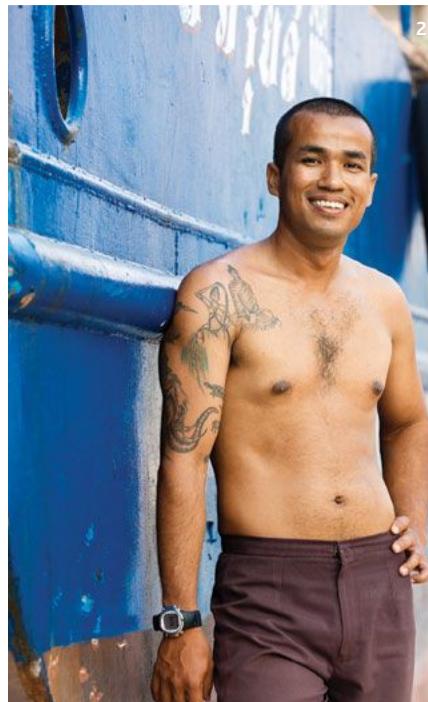


1. Dusk falls on the coastline of Koh Phi-Phi Don

2. Diving instructor Sangsit 'Top' Sriwarin

3. A beach cleaner sweeps the sands of Hat Laem Thong

Facing page: The turquoise waters of Loh Samah bay



## Essentials

### WHERE TO STAY

**Zeavola Resort**: This is the most luxurious place to stay on Koh Phi-Phi. The wooden lodges are lavishly decked out – glossy teak floors, floor-to-ceiling windows, handmade island furniture. Each has its own wooden deck overlooking either the neatly-tended gardens or the sands of Hat Laem Thong (00-66-765-627-000; [zeavola.com](http://zeavola.com); 11, Moo 8, Laem Tong; from ₹20,500 with breakfast).

### WHERE TO EAT

Nearly all resorts have their own restaurants, but, for more local island flavour, head to **Jasmine Restaurant** on Hat Laem Thong. It has a lively beach-shack vibe and does spicy Thai standards such as *pad Thai* and green papaya salad to a tee. It's also a great place to rub shoulders with the locals (00-66-862-770-959; Laem Tong Beach; mains from ₹600).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

[kohphiphi-don.com](http://kohphiphi-don.com)





## 5 KOH LANTA *Best for cuisine*

**DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 10 – 11**

KOH LANTA IS TWO HOURS BY FERRY FROM KOH PHI-PHI. A COUPLE OF SCHEDULED BOAT TRIPS OPERATE DAILY AND MUCH FASTER SPEEDBOAT SERVICES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE

"If you want to understand Thailand, you need to understand how we cook," declares Bim Kanmanee as she begins a lesson at the Time for Lime Cooking School on Koh Lanta. It's early evening and a breeze drifts in from Hat Khlong Dao Beach. Nearby, punters sip cold beers and lemongrass margaritas in the school's beach bar, illuminated by paper lanterns swinging gently in the wind.

Bim turns her attention to her worktop, stacked high with bird's eye chillies, bulbs of *galangal*, bunches of sweet basil and kaffir limes. Picking up a cleaver that looks too big for her slender frame, she chops and blends the ingredients into a paste. Spicy aromas soon fill the air. As each student takes a taste, their faces light up with grins. "You see?" laughs Bim. "That's the real taste of Thailand. You'll never buy that in a jar."

Established 10 years ago by Norwegian expat Junie Kovacs, Time for Lime was the first cookery school to be founded on Koh Lanta. Students come from far and wide to discover the secrets of the region's cuisine, and it makes an ideal place to learn: seafood bars line the main beaches, and the streets of Ban Saladan and Koh Lanta's old town are lined with shacks selling staples such as *pad Thai* (stir-fried noodles), *tom yum* (hot and sour soup) and *gaeng pah*

(spicy jungle curry). Every day, fishermen auction fresh hauls of lobster, barracuda, king mackerel and langoustine on the island's quaysides, haggling with customers among the pandemonium of crab pots and fishing nets.

"Often, we find that what our students think of as Thai cuisine isn't authentic," says Bim, who has been working at the school for the past five years. "Four flavours are essential to Thai cuisine – sweet, sour, salty and spicy. The combination makes Thai cuisine what it is, but it takes a lifetime to learn. I've been cooking since I was a small girl and I'm still learning new things."

Food is inextricably linked with Thailand's identity. Shared family meals are still part of daily life for most Thai people, and girls are taught techniques of traditional cuisine from a very young age, always cooking from scratch using fresh ingredients – lime juice for sourness, palm sugar for sweetness, fish sauce for saltiness and chillies for heat. Food even underpins the language. One of the country's most common greetings, "*Gin khao reu yung?*", literally translates as "Have you eaten rice yet?".

"Food is a part of Thailand's soul," Bim continues, stirring away at a batch of green curry bubbling away on the stove. "It brings people together, and there's nothing more important in life than that." ☀

### Essentials



#### WHERE TO STAY

**Costa Lanta:** With its sharp lines and infinity pool, this boutique complex near Hat Khlong Dao Beach wouldn't look out of place in a design magazine. The minimalist bungalows are spread across a garden and feature touches like concertina doors, rain showers and rendered concrete walls (00-66-75-668-186; [costalanta.com](http://costalanta.com); 212, Moo 1, Saladan; from ₹12,900 with breakfast).

#### WHERE TO EAT

**Maladee** serves some of the best Thai food around. Standards are high – try the Thai-spiced mussels or flame-grilled barracuda (00-66-878-913-149; *flame-grilled barracuda*: ₹500).

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

Time for Lime runs courses daily from 4pm to 9pm, covering a range of dishes. All profits are donated to Lanta Animal Welfare (00-66-75-684-590; [timeforlime.net](http://timeforlime.net); 72/2, Moo 3, Klong Dao Beach, Saladan; from ₹3,400/person).

A bowl of *kaeng khao wan*  
(Thai green curry)

Facing page:

1. Bim Kanmanee at the  
Time for Lime Cooking School
2. Preparing fresh shallots and garlic
3. Thai sweet basil



The limestone islets of Cheow Lan Lake in Khao Sok National Park



## WHERE TO ESCAPE THE CROWDS

Thailand's beauty is no secret, but there are still a few wonders that remain relatively under wraps



### KHAO SOK NATIONAL PARK

About a two hours' drive north of Phuket, this national park includes one of the oldest lowland rainforests on Earth, dating back 160 million years. Covering 1,191sq km, it's home to some of Thailand's rarest flora and fauna, including sun bears, barking deer and clouded leopards, plus more than 300 bird species. The best way to visit is on a guided hike, ideally in the dry season (Dec–Apr). Bungalows and eco-lodges dot the park's edges ([khaosok.com](http://khaosok.com); from ₹20,900 adult, ₹10,450 child, with transport, accommodation, meals and services of a guide).

### KOH TARUTAO

Few people make the long journey south to the islands of the Koh Tarutao Marine National Park, but if you're looking for pristine island scenery, this is certainly where you'll find it. This enormous national park encompasses 51 islands, most of which are uninhabited and covered in virgin rainforest. They are a haven for all kinds of birds, animals and underwater life, and have some of the healthiest coral reefs in Thailand. Base yourself on the island of Koh Tarutao, where you can sleep in bungalows ([dnp.go.th](http://dnp.go.th)).

### KOH KUT

It's only a quick trip from the popular island of Koh Chang on Thailand's Gulf Coast, but Koh Kut receives far, far fewer visitors. It's still remarkably underdeveloped – there are only around 20 small resorts dotted along its heavily-forested coastline, and nearly every one has its own patch of private beach. Active types will find plenty of opportunities for diving, hiking and snorkelling, but, for most people, Koh Kut is simply a place to kick back and watch the island tides roll by ([kokut.com](http://kokut.com)).

## Make it Happen: Thailand's Islands

### Essentials

#### ► BEST TIME TO VISIT

While it's always raining somewhere in Thailand, December to April is widely considered to be the best time to visit.

#### ► GETTING THERE

Thai Airways and Singapore Airlines fly from all Indian metros to Phuket with a halt in Bangkok (*return fares from ₹ 22,000*).

#### ► GETTING AROUND

Most islands are served by regular passenger ferries, although sailings and timetables are highly weather-dependent, especially from May to October. One of the largest operators is Tigerline Travel, which runs to islands including Koh Lanta, Koh Tarutao, Koh Phi-Phi, Koh Kradan and Phuket ([tigerlinetravel.com](http://tigerlinetravel.com)). Tuk-tuks are the easiest way to explore on dry land, although scooters and bicycles can usually be hired.

#### ► VISA

You can get a Thai visa on arrival at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport for THB 1,000 (*about ₹ 1,890*). Visit the embassy website for more information ([thaiemb.org.in](http://thaiemb.org.in)).

#### ► EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Bangkok: [indianembassy.in.th](http://indianembassy.in.th)

#### ► CURRENCY

Thai Baht (THB) 1 = ₹ 1.89

#### ► FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Thailand* and *Thailand's Islands & Beaches* guides have all the island-hopping info you'll need. Tezza's Beach Blog has advice on the best islands ([tezzathailandbeachesandislands.blogspot.com](http://tezzathailandbeachesandislands.blogspot.com)).

#### ► VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Though Thai flavours are quite familiar, be wary of fish sauce (*nam pla*) – which gets added to a lot of otherwise vegetarian preparations. The all-veg Curry Delight Indian Restaurant comes recommended for its desi treats (00-66-83-181-6233; [currydelightphuket.com](http://currydelightphuket.com); 227/2, Koktanot Rd, Kata Beach, Muang, Phuket; 11am – 11pm; *dal tadka*: ₹ 350).



Traditional longtail boats lined up at Laem Tong Beach

## 3

### WAYS TO DO PHUKET

	Budget	Mid-range	Luxury
► STAY	<p><b>BARGAIN!</b> Despite bargain prices, the <b>Merrison Inn</b> offers plenty of style – polished floors, flatscreen TVs and cosy Thai-themed interiors. It's a five-minute walk from the packed sands of Patong (00-66-76-340-383; <a href="http://merrisoninn.com">merrisoninn.com</a>; Patong Rd, Patong Beach, Kathu; <i>from ₹ 2,700</i>).</p>	<p>Set back from Kamala Beach, <b>Cape Sienna Hotels &amp; Villas</b> combines designer lines with ocean views. Rooms are modern with private balconies. The best have whirlpool baths overlooking the sea (00-66-76-337-300; <a href="http://capesienna.com">capesienna.com</a>; 18/40, Moo 6, Nakalay Rd, Kamala, Kathu; <i>from ₹ 11,800</i>).</p>	<p><b>Indigo Pearl</b> features industrial-chic decor inspired by Phuket's tin-mining heritage. The top-end Cooon Suite has its own private pool and spa (00-66-76-327-600; <a href="http://indigo-pearl.com">indigo-pearl.com</a>; Nai Yang Beach and National Park; <i>from ₹ 17,000 with breakfast</i>).</p>
► EAT	<p><b>BARGAIN!</b> Just behind Hat Karon Beach, the <b>Pad Thai Shop</b> (right) is where locals eat. The house specialty is full of spicy sweetness (<i>Th Patak East, Hat Karon; 9am – 8pm; from ₹ 120</i>).</p>	<p>Lodged inside the luxurious <b>Villa Royale Hotel</b> on Kata Noi beach, <b>Mom Tri's Kitchen</b> blends Thai and European fine dining with superb ocean views. The wine list is among the best in Phuket (00-66-76-333-569; <a href="http://momtripphuket.com">momtripphuket.com</a>; 12, Kata Noi Rd, Kata Noi Beach; 6am – 12am; <i>mains from ₹ 700</i>).</p>	<p><b>BARGAIN!</b> Near Ao Bang Thao's beach, <b>Siam Supper Club</b> is one of Phuket's most stylish places to dine. The menu offers fusion dishes such as Thai-spiced lamb and blue swimmer crab cakes (00-66-76-270-936; <a href="http://siamsupperclub.com">siamsupperclub.com</a>; 36 – 40, Lagoon Rd, Cherngtalay, Thalang; 6pm – 10pm; <i>crab cakes: ₹ 850</i>).</p>
► DO/ SEE	<p>The <b>Gibbon Rehabilitation Project</b> rescues abused gibbons in the hope that they can be returned to the wild. The centre is in the Khaoy Phra Thaew National Park, about 20km north of Phuket (00-66-76-260-491; <a href="http://gibbonproject.org">gibbonproject.org</a>; 104/3, Moo 3, Packlock, Talang; 9am – 4.30pm Fri – Wed, till 3pm Thur; <i>free</i>).</p> <p>Perched on granite boulders, the <b>Ska Bar</b> is a breezy beach hangout at the southern end of Hat Kata Yai, ideal for seaside sundowners accompanied by a reggae soundtrack (<a href="http://skabar-phuket.com">skabar-phuket.com</a>; 186/12, Patak Rd, Kata Beach; 12pm till late; <i>drinks from ₹ 200</i>).</p>	<p>Warm waters and reliable swells make Phuket ideal for learning the basics of surfing (top). <b>Phuket Surf</b> on Hat Kata Yai offers lessons for new and experienced boarders (00-66-87-889-7308; <a href="http://phuketsurf.com">phuketsurf.com</a>; south end of Kata Beach; ₹ 2,850/ person for a 90-minute private session).</p> <p>With its chandeliers and continental beers, <b>Sanaeha</b> is where the locals go to party in Phuket Town. The clientele is mostly Thai and there's live music several times a week (00-66-81-519-8937; 83, 85, Th Yaowarat; 6pm till late Tues – Sat; <i>drinks from ₹ 400</i>).</p>	<p>Pamper yourself among thatched huts and lily ponds at the <b>Six Senses Spa</b> on Koh Yao Noi. Treatments include acupressure, body cocoons and Thai massage (00-66-76-418-500; <a href="http://sixsenses.com">sixsenses.com</a>; <i>one hour Thai Silk facial: ₹ 8,000</i>).</p> <p>Drink cocktails with a glitzy crowd at <b>The 9th Floor</b>, Phuket's highest open-air bar. It's a far cry from the Patong fleshpots, all tinkling pianos, sharply-dressed waiters and 360° views (00-66-76-344-311; <a href="http://the9thfloor.com">the9thfloor.com</a>; 47, Rat-u-Thid Rd, Sky Inn Condotel, Patong; 4pm till late; <i>wine from ₹ 1,900</i>).</p>

1. The surfing instructors make it look so very easy

2. These cute bottle aprons from The Linen Shoppe are lovely gifts to take back home

3. The *Escondidinho* at Go With The Flow is heaven on a plate

4. The Crocodile Dundee Boat Trips give you the wonderful chance to admire these beauties up close

5. Keep an eye out for these gorgeous white-breasted kingfishers



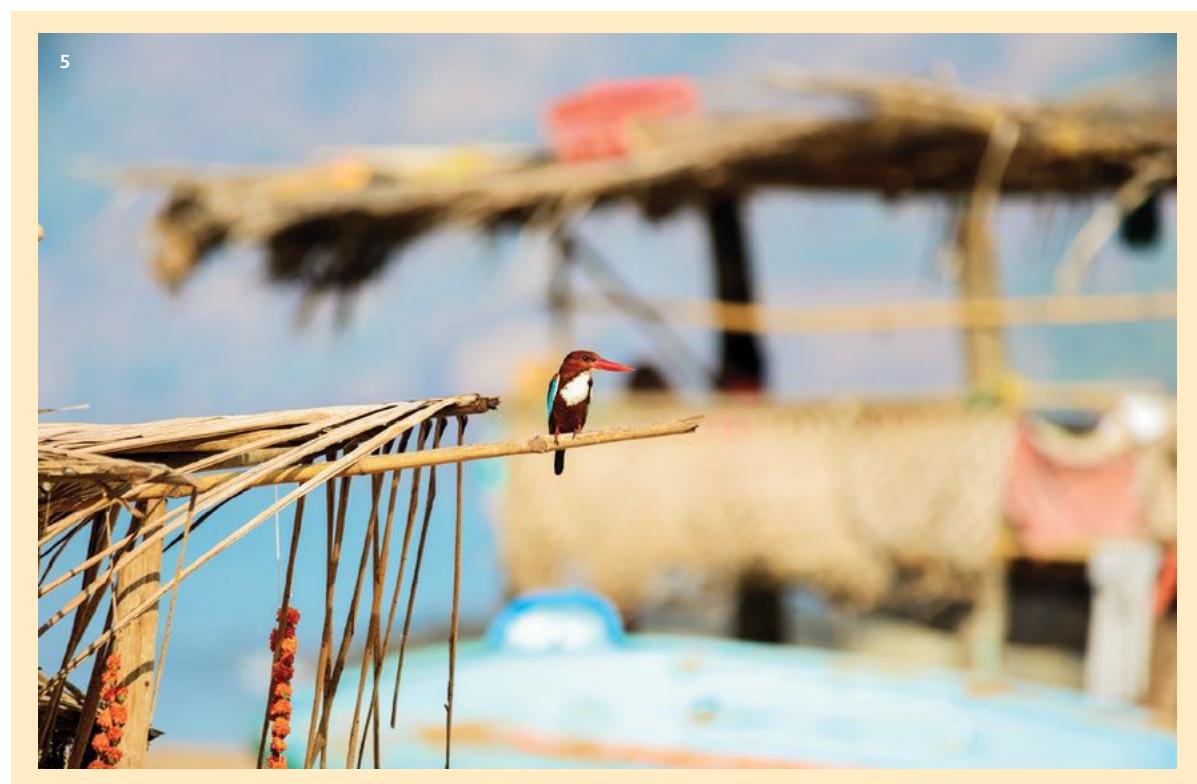
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# ONE STATE, FOUR WAYS

# *Goa*

Go with the girls, the family, the partner or the lads – Goa's got a whole host of unexplored things for everyone

WORDS NADEZNA SIGANPORIA | PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA



I'm standing at Dabolim International Airport at the ungodly hour of 7am, waiting for my taxi and wondering what on earth Goa can show me now that I haven't already experienced in the last million times I've been there. What I discover over the next week is that factions of this wonderful oasis are trying to alter, just ever so slightly, that typical vibe that Goa is so known for.

Goa should never completely change; I really don't want it to, because that's what we all go there for – a chilled-out getaway largely spent spread out on the beach. But **there are people who, in the process of reinventing themselves, have reinvented Goa as well.**

These are the people I meet, and these are the people who show me things I can now cross off my bucket list – some of which weren't even on the list to begin with.

Goa can be exactly what you expect, and yet, just when you're getting comfortable with your toes wedged firmly in the sand, it pulls the rug out from under us by throwing options like kite-surfing at you. Kiting, as the cool kids call kite-surfing, is gaining a fair bit of popularity here; walk down Morjim Beach on a windy day to find out just how many people are giving it a go. Or, if you're here, head out on one of the Crocodile Dundee Boat Trips, which will see you gaping at a 3m monster in no time. You and your buddies have a free afternoon? Stash those beers and check out North Goa's hamlets and the Fort Aguada area on a 15km-long cycling tour. There's a lot going on that most wouldn't even know to try, like a pottery class with the extremely fun Mayank Jain, or enjoying a sunset *à deux* on the Mapusa River on the Solita, 42ft of pure, floating luxury. And, thankfully, there's always going to be that part of Goa we know and love: those glorious beaches, those utterly relaxing spa massages, those drunken nights spent crooning away at karaoke bars and the incredible food. *This is why we keep going back to Goa; it never ceases to surprise while somehow managing to stay exactly the same.*



1

## 1 GREAT FOR GOING NATURAL Natti's Naturals

From the outside, the store and café are quite unassuming, housed in a simple white building that leads to an open area covered with a simple white canopy. I admit I'm not really expecting much, but once I enter the store, I realise what the fuss is all about.

Natti's Naturals has a small store that is packed to the rafters with everything from cleanses to natural detergents, from organic coconut, apricot and flaxseed oils to gluten-free yummies; from natural cosmetics to chemical-free mosquito repellents and beautiful candles. While I make a beeline for the section stocking products from Maroma (I especially love the Bamboo Charcoal range), Natasha, the Natti from the name, tells me she sources her products from around the country, and fills me in on the early-morning yoga class run here; *not* my cup of tea on vacation, but hey! She also stocks superfoods like flaxseed and quinoa, so if you and your girls are like me, you'll end up leaving with plenty of treats.

As much fun as the store is, the café is the star here; the menu is chock-full of organic and natural foods, perfect for a detox. Everything is prepared fresh, especially the fruit juices and salads; if they run out of the organic veggies, Natti will be the first one to tell you. Even hard-core non-vegetarians will appreciate the Veggie Bowl, served with a mouthwatering pumpkin hummus or burnt aubergine dip. If a detox isn't part

1. Pick up some fantastic products at Natti's Naturals
2. This simple white cottage is chock-full of natural and organic goodies
3. The Veggie Bowl – so fresh and absolutely delicious

3



2

of the plan, though, try the Bacon Omelette, and finish with a hunk of the Gluten-free Nutti Chocolate Cake. Yum! → 00-91-8550999422; nattisnaturals@gmail.com; 1251, Gaunwadi, opposite Bhumika Temple, Anjuna-Calangute Rd, Anjuna; café and store: 9am – 6pm, yoga classes: 7am – 8am (call in advance to book); mains from ₹ 190, store products from ₹ 120, yoga: ₹ 300/ class

### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** Why not? The food's great.
- ⌚ **Couples:** Yup, the store is full of goodies for your home.
- ⌚ **Families:** Healthy and delicious food is good for the brood.

## 2 GREAT FOR CROSSING OFF YOUR BUCKET LIST

### Kite-surfing

"Do not look at your kite!"

Easier said than done, when all I can seem to do is squint at my kite. You need to be aware of your surroundings while kite-surfing, so the last thing you should do (and, as it turns out, the *only* thing I did) is focus solely on your kite. Philippe, an International Kite-boarding Organisation-certified instructor lets me in on a little secret to make me feel better: this is one of the hardest things to get used to, and *everyone* struggles with it.

Kite-surfing involves aspects of surfing, wake-boarding and paragliding, but you'll have quite a while to go before you get to that level. Start out with the Discovery Course, which is about three hours long. It gives you a basic understanding of how to handle and manoeuvre the trainer kite on land while getting used to the pull as well as the feel of the harness, along with a short theory session on safety precautions and techniques. Chances are, after this, you're going to want more, so if you have the time, try either the Non-Certified Course (10 hours) or the IKO Certified Course (16 hours), both of which have three-hour sessions spread over a few days. You get to practise flying the kite for a major part of each course, as learning to handle it is the most important element. Once you get the hang of it, take your board and test your skills on the water.

There is definitely an element of danger, as with all extreme sports, and you'll probably

have butterflies in your stomach, but when you let go of your fears and learn to enjoy it, it's the thrill of a lifetime.

00-91-9860452162; [kitesurfinggoa.blogspot.com](http://kitesurfinggoa.blogspot.com), [yogikiting@gmail.com](mailto:yogikiting@gmail.com); meet at Montego Bay Beach Village, Morjim Beach; classes start at 2pm daily Oct – May at Morjim Beach, depending on wind and water conditions; Discovery Course: ₹ 1,500/hour, Non-Certified Course: ₹ 15,000, IKO Certified Course: ₹ 22,000

### ALSO FOR:

👉 **Bands of boys:** Definitely! A maximum of three people are taught at a time on land, and it's one-on-one in the water.

👉 **Couples:** It isn't the most romantic activity (read: not at all), but adventure junkies should definitely give it a go.

👉 **Families:** This works for families with older kids – the minimum age is 12 years, and the instructors are very careful.





### 3 GREAT FOR YOUR TUMMY

#### Learning to cook at Little Siolim

Food is such an integral part of travel, and any group of food-loving girls would do well to dive taste-buds first into Goa's local cuisine. Siolim Cooking School goes one step further to enhance your gastronomic journey in Goa, with a three-odd hour cooking class.

You'll start with a visit to a fish and vegetable market – noisy, chaotic and utterly crowded, just the way local markets are supposed to be, and your host Natty (a different one from the 'Natural' Natti in Arjuna) will effortlessly walk you through buying fresh seafood and veggies according to your chosen dishes. Back in the sprawling open kitchen of the Little Siolim hotel, she will teach you how to whip up the most mouthwatering traditional Goan dishes with the freshest ingredients. Classics like Goan crab curry, pork *sorpotel*, chicken *cafreal* and fish *caldine* are a few dishes you can learn to prepare. And just so you don't forget, you'll be given a recipe book with easy-to-follow instructions to take home. Those of you who aren't fans of the kitchen will still get fed, so there's no reason to split up, either. So don those chefs' hats, tie those apron strings and make sure you don't eat a heavy breakfast, because lunch by the little pool is going to be so worth it!

00-91-9822584560, 00-91-832-2272941; [cookingclassesgoa.com](http://cookingclassesgoa.com); meet at Siolim House, Wadi, Siolim; cooking classes held at Little Siolim, Siolim-Assagao Rd, Siolim; market visit: 9.30am, cooking class: 10am; class and market visit: ₹ 2,500, class only: ₹ 2,200, both inclusive of lunch, friends who do not participate in the cooking class can have lunch for ₹ 500 each

#### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** Go for it if you have the time (and the inclination).
- ⌚ **Couples:** Sure!
- ⌚ **Families:** This really isn't one for the kids.



### 4 GREAT FOR SOME R&R

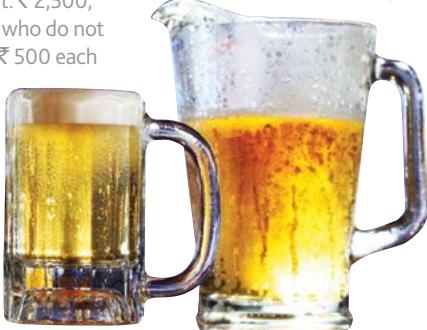
#### Spa options for all budgets

Spa days and girlie vacations are a no-brainer, really. What you probably don't know is that breaking the bank doesn't have to be part of the deal. The Snip Salon & Spa branches are quite popular with locals, offering great, affordable services. The Asian Head Massage (₹ 800/ 45 min) and Japanese Shiatsu Massage (₹ 2,000/ hour) come recommended. Or, try the Snip Wellness Treatment, which includes a face-and-body Balinese massage with vitamin E cream (₹ 3,000/ 90 min).

For something a tad more luxurious, head to Zaara Spa at Resort Rio. The staff recommends the Zaara Signature Noor-E-Taj Couple Experience (yeah, we know it's for couples but you can always take your girlfriends along), which includes a 30-minute Almond Cleansing Scrub, a Sandalwood & Honey Scrub for an hour, an Aromatherapy massage for an hour and ends with a Saffron Flower Bath (₹ 12,000).

If you guys are *really* looking to splurge, head to Sereno Spa at the Park Hyatt Goa Resort & Spa. Uber luxurious, you'll feel the pampering in every bone. Try the Sarvagadhara treatment, where warm oils are applied continuously on the body by two Ayurveda therapists and accompanied by a light massage (*from* ₹ 6,500/ hour). Or go in for the signature treatment, the Marine Experience, which uses seaweed and mineral-based products (₹ 9,500/ 3.5 hours). →

Snip Salon & Spa: [snip.co.in](http://snip.co.in); check website for locations; 10am – 9pm; Zaara Spa: 00-91-832-2267300; [zaaraspa.com](http://zaaraspa.com); Resort Rio, Tambudki, Arpora; 8am – 8pm; Park Hyatt Goa Resort & Spa: 00-91-832-2721234; [goa.park.hyatt.com](http://goa.park.hyatt.com); Arossim Beach, Cansaulim; 9am – 9pm, therapies from 11am – 8pm



#### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** Sure, why not?
- ⌚ **Couples:** Yup, they all have couple experiences to try.
- ⌚ **Families:** Spas and kids? Nope!

For Families



## 5 GREAT FOR GAWKING AT NATURE

### Crocodile Dundee Boat Trip

It's one of those surreal moments, gaping at a croc lounging just a few metres away. You're not really expecting this majestic creature to have such an effect on you, yet here you are, stunned and speechless. The Cumbarjua Canal that links the Mandovi River to the Zuari River is said to have quite a large *mugger* population. I'm inclined to believe this bit of information, considering we've spotted four hiding in the mangrove-riven banks. The captain tries to steer the boat closer towards them as quietly as possible, and you'll have to keep your excitement in check – sudden movements and loud noises will send them scurrying. The boat ride in itself is quite enjoyable, and, when you're not looking out for crocs, you'll spot various species of birds along the way.

I have to admit though, that I couldn't help feeling like an intruder, and it was reassuring to hear that these beautiful creatures are usually not bothered by us gawking at them, as long as we don't get too close, and that there are precautions taken, like turning off the engines on spotting one of them. 00-91-832-6520190; [johnboattours.com](http://johnboattours.com); office: near Newton's Supermarket, Candolim; pick-up from 8am – 8.30am depending on your location, Sun and Thur, closed in the monsoon; ₹ 1,400/ person for a three-hour trip with transfers, beverages and snacks

#### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** It's a thrill to see them so close.
- ⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Yup, book it.
- ⌚ **Couples:** Even those who aren't fascinated by nature will be able to appreciate this.

1. Go gawk at the crocs; this is as close as it gets!

2. Kids will love the go-karting circuit at Nuvem

3. Picnic with the family at the peaceful and utterly beautiful Reis Magos

## 6 GREAT FOR A LITTLE SPEED

### Go-karting at Nuvem

There are a few activities that are unique to Goa, and go-karting isn't one of them, so we won't blame you for wondering what's so special about this one. The charmer here is the circuit itself: a 386m-long winding track located atop a hill in the tiny hamlet of Nuvem.

You'll love the incredible sea views, especially at sunset while zipping around the course. Even if the kids haven't tried karting before, the experience here is relatively safe, and wearing helmets is mandatory with absolutely no exceptions. It turns out that getting a hang of these non-gearied karts is really easy, even on this track, which is full of tricky twists and turns. You'll start out with a brief introduction, instructions on how to operate the kart along with a few safety guidelines like, never stepping out of the kart on the track. Make sure you don't wear very loose clothing or anything that could get caught, like saris or scarves. In fact, they are so strict about safety that you won't be allowed to race if you're not dressed appropriately. The track has been a little quiet lately, so even if you can't get through beforehand, chances are, if you land up at the venue, you'll definitely have a go behind the wheel. 00-91-832-2734129, 00-91-832-2757899; Nuvem Village, Salcette, South Goa; 4pm – 10pm, closed Mon; single-seater: ₹ 300/ 10 laps, two-seater: ₹ 400/ 10 laps

#### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** Of course! Boys and their toys, right?
- ⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Go for it!
- ⌚ **Couples:** Why not?



## 7 GREAT FOR A QUIET ESCAPE Bird-watching break with Canopy Goa

You couldn't ask for a more serene location for a quiet family getaway than right at the border of the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary, surrounded by beautiful forests and unspoilt nature and with eight rustic cottages and delicious local eats to complement the experiences on offer courtesy Canopy Goa.

The Regular Birding Package includes two nature walks, a bonfire and a night's stay at Nature's Nest, the on-site property. The evening nature walk starts at around 4pm, and will take you to the Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary. With an eye peeled for birds, you'll hike to an elevated vantage point from where you'll witness the sun set behind the rolling hills. The next day, set off bright and early for the morning two-hour nature walk.

If you're craving more family time, try the two-night, three-day package, which includes treks in Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary, Tambdi Surla and the Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary. To hone your birding skills, you can check the Canopy Goa website for a list of over 200 species of birds you could spot. Though prime bird season is between October and March, you can visit through the year. 00-91-8407954664, 00-91-9764261711; [canopygoa.com](http://canopygoa.com), [naturesnestgoa.com](http://naturesnestgoa.com), [info@canopygoa.com](mailto:info@canopygoa.com); office: Shop 8, Sapana Arcade, Malbhat, Margao; Nature's Nest: Surla-Sacodem, Dharbandora; Regular Birding Package: ₹ 4,000/ two on a twin-sharing basis, ₹ 800 child (6 – 10 years) sharing room, with all meals, taxes and two nature trails

### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** Maybe, if you're looking to end your trip with a quiet escape.
- ⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Nature lovers will enjoy this experience; otherwise, skip it.
- ⌚ **Couples:** Beautiful sunsets, seclusion and sounds of nature: could be quite romantic.

## 8 GREAT FOR SOME FAMILY TIME Reis Magos Fort

The view from Reis Magos Fort is quite spectacular, especially as the sun is setting over the horizon. Overlooking the Mandovi River estuary with Panjim in the background, this is a wonderful place to take the family.

Built in the 16th century, the fort was used for defence, then turned into a jail, and finally refurbished and opened to the public in 2012. The citadel section is studded with Portuguese turrets and restored cannons, the halls have been turned into a cultural landmark, with craft centres displaying the works of Mario Miranda and the gun loops in the bastion turned into museums displaying the history of Goa.

One of the nicest parts of the experience is the lack of crowds here; you'll get to roam the grounds at your own leisurely pace. And once you're done with your exploration into Goa's fascinating past, you can have a little picnic in a quiet corner and spend some quality time with the family. → 00-91-832-2410711, 00-91-832-2904649; [reismagosfort.com](http://reismagosfort.com), [reismagosfort@gmail.com](mailto:reismagosfort@gmail.com); Verem, Bardez; 9.30am – 6.30pm, last entry 5.30pm, Tues – Sun; ₹ 50

### ALSO FOR:

- ⌚ **Bands of boys:** Go to play pirates and defenders.
- ⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Probably not what you're looking for on a girls' trip.
- ⌚ **Couples:** An intimate picnic at sunset with panoramic ocean views sounds pretty good!





## 9 GREAT FOR RETAIL THERAPY Shop-hopping

That Goa has a vast list of shopping choices comes as no surprise. Walk down any road, and you're bound to pick something up. While flea-market shopping is great, Goa's starting to do some high-quality stuff, too. Head to **The Linen Shoppe** in Panjim for some really interesting home furnishings. The store's got themed sets for your dining table, living room, kitchen, bedrooms, bathrooms, floors, walls... you get the idea. While you'll be able to redecorate your entire home with the beautiful offerings from the ethnic or European styles at very reasonable rates, don't forget to check out the extremely cute utility bags, kitchen towels and lace window trimmings.

For one-of-a-kind and exclusive outfits and accessories, head to **The Private Collection** in Candolim. The owner Ramona Galardi is a designer herself, and her collection is mostly sourced from other designers – everything is made in India. Ethnic embroidered silk jackets, classic Audrey Hepburn dresses, hippie bags are all part of this eclectic trove.

Don't forget to pay your respects to the vintage Hermès Weekender Bag!

Back to homeware, **Freedom Tree** at Sangolda has a fantastic mix of brightly-coloured furnishings, crockery, furniture, fabrics, lamps, rugs and home decor. Based on the concept of 'colour trends', this range is designed in-house, and raw materials are sourced only from within the country.

**The Linen Shoppe:** 00-91-832-2223404; Vivenda Sao Sebastio, House No E-74, Campal Heritage Precinct, Panjim; 9.30am – 6.30pm Mon – Sat; from ₹ 100

**The Private Collection:** 00-91-832-2489033; 1255, Annawaddo, Candolim; 10am – 8pm Mon – Sat, from 11am Sun; clothes from ₹ 2,200

**The Freedom Tree:** 00-91-832-2278006; freedomtree.in; House 78, Mae de Deus Vaddo, CHOGM Rd, Sangolda; 10am – 8pm; from ₹ 500

### ALSO FOR:

⌚ **Bands of boys:** Nope.

⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Only if you have the time.

⌚ **Families:** Only if you've got someone to leave the kids with – they're bound to get bored.



1. Colours play a huge role in the designs at Freedom Tree

2. Discover the ocean in a different way with the seabed walk

3. These cushion covers are great for adding a little colour to your home



## 10 GREAT FOR AN AFFAIR WITH THE SEA Seabed walk

As you hop on to the sea-walk platform bobbing away in the ocean, with the shores of Baina Beach behind you, the first thing you'll notice are these huge, dome-shaped fibreglass helmets. They look like something more out of a sci-fi movie than a rom-com, and I'm told they weigh nearly 40kg. So how on earth will you manage to glide along the bed of the ocean with that contraption on your head? Fortunately, I realise each weighs a mere 300g underwater, so you barely feel yours.

This guided underwater walk isn't a daring activity; in fact, you don't even need to know how to swim to enjoy this one. Armed with a brief on hand signals, fitted with weights around your waist, and with the helmet resting on your shoulders, you'll be slowly guided down the ladder on to the seabed. With one walk leader and two divers surrounding you, you are taken along a preset path to see corals, marine plants and fish. You'll be very tempted to touch the corals but it's best to be a spectator here.

There admittedly isn't all that much to see, but it is quite an experience to feel the seabed beneath your feet, the ocean cocooning you in its private world, and the sunlight dancing on the surface about 10ft above you.

00-91-9225580080; H2O Watersports, Baina Beach, Vasco; 9.30am, 10.15am and 11am Oct – May subject to weather conditions; ₹ 2,000/ person/ 20-minute walk, use of lockers, luggage rooms, life jackets and equipment; pregnant women, people with high blood pressure, acute asthma or anyone who has suffered a heart attack are advised not to participate

### ALSO FOR:

⌚ **Bands of boys:** Great if you're just starting to like the water...

⌚ **Gangs of girls:** A maximum of two people can walk at a go.

⌚ **Families:** Kids over 10 will enjoy the experience.



## 11 GREAT FOR CENTRING OURSELVES Mayank Jain's Pottery Class

It's mesmerising to watch him turn a lump of wet clay into a beautiful shape in a matter of seconds. Standing in the middle of Mayank Jain's peaceful little studio in Nerul, surrounded by scores of his intricate clay, ceramic and terracotta creations (a few of which I will leave with), I suddenly feel a little intimidated by that lump.

I'm told that the most minuscule movement will show in my design; my creation will reflect my state of mind, and so, I need to be still, calm and at peace. This is not something one can master in one sitting – the first session is a basic introduction to the electric wheel using stoneware clay. You start with details of how to prepare the clay and move on to working on the wheel. You will definitely need a little practice learning how to throw, centre and turn your creations on the wheel. You also get an introduction to hand building, which, I have to admit, is a hell of a lot easier.

Working on the wheel requires a fair bit of patience, but once you get used to the feel of the clay responding to your controlled touch, the process is very therapeutic. 00-91-9987017590; mayankjainpottery.com, cyfernerd@gmail.com; 809, Dannadi, near Nerul Church, Nerul; 10am – 5pm; ₹ 250/ hour

### ALSO FOR:

⌚ **Bands of boys:** Nah!

⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Only if it's your thing, though the sessions are one-on-one.

⌚ **Families:** We don't think kids will have the patience for the potter's wheel, though they might like the hand-building part.



## 12 GREAT FOR A LUXURIOUSLY ROMANTIC EVENING

### Sunset cruise on the Solita

I can't think of a better way to earn some major brownie points with your partner than by organising a surprise sunset cruise on a luxury yacht. Yes, it sounds OTT extravagant, but just think of how many sticky situations you'll be forgiven for!

The Solita is 42 feet of pure luxury; her beautiful teak accents and classic lines cruise past a glorious sunset down the Mapusa River while you lounge about on the front and rear decks or head up to the flybridge for a better view. This is the very definition of a big romantic gesture. The lounge area beneath the decks has an adjoining pantry and is flanked by two bedroom cabins with ensuite baths. With a fully-qualified crew to accompany and assist you, it is easy enough to get used to this life. For three hours, you'll feel utterly pampered and gloriously overwhelmed.

And trust me on those brownie points! →

00-91-9930712785, 00-91-832-2276941; solita.in, solita@odyssey.co.in; board from Britona Jetty, North Goa; sunset cruise 5pm – 7pm Sat, private charter on demand; ₹ 2,500/ person for sunset cruise, ₹ 15,000/ hour for private charter (up to 27 guests), price includes a welcome drink and snacks

### ALSO FOR:

⌚ **Bands of boys:** Not really. Leave this one to the lovebirds!

⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Would definitely make for a fantastic bachelorette party; the Solita can accommodate up to 27 guests.

⌚ **Families:** Kids would like the cruise but might not appreciate the element of luxury, which is a big part of the charm.

1. Learning to work a potter's wheel with Mayank Jain can be quite therapeutic

2. Watching a beautiful Goan sunset aboard the Solita is as romantic as it gets





## 13 GREAT FOR STRETCHING THOSE MUSCLES

### Cycling around North Goa

If you want to make up for those missed gym sessions, a cycling tour of North Goa will definitely get your blood pumping. Goa Nature Trails conducts what can be described as a hybrid cycling tour – part city roads and part dirt tracks. This 15km trail meanders over rocky tracks, past main roads with speeding traffic, and up steep, rough inclines, so if you haven't been all that active in the past, maybe you should skip this one.

Starting from the Amigos restaurant in Nerul, you'll cycle on Nerul Bridge via Candolim Village to the main CHOGM Road. This leg of the tour has traffic whizzing past you, so be aware of your surroundings. From here, the tour cuts through a dirt track up a steep incline (if you're anything like me you'll walk your cycle up to the cliff) in the Aguada area. Leaving your cycles on the plateau, you trek down to the Aguada Forts ramparts with incredible views of the ocean and the setting sun. Back up on the plateau with that gorgeous panoramic view in the background, the route now takes you downhill along rough, rocky paths and through the jungles to Sinquerim fishing village. From here, you retrace your steps along the main CHOGM Road via Candolim and back to Amigos where you'll binge on chicken *cafreal* and fries because, trust me, you'll be ravenous. And because you've earned it.

00-91-7030973005; [goanaturetrails.com](http://goanaturetrails.com); meet at Amigos restaurant, under Nerul Bridge, Nerul, Bardez; 3.30pm; ₹ 1,900/ person for a three to four-hour tour with mountain bikes, helmets and post-tour snack; stamina and basic level of fitness required

#### ALSO FOR:

⌚ **Gangs of girls:** Definitely! Groups consist of a minimum of two to a maximum of 12 people.

⌚ **Couples:** Sure. This activity fits into the moderate adventure category and you should be comfortable cycling in medium to heavy traffic.

⌚ **Families:** Children who are regularly active do enjoy the cycling tour though the minimum age is 10 years. The estimated difficulty level for youngsters is 7/10. There is a car with a carrier in case fatigue strikes.

1

## 14 GREAT FOR FLOATING ALONG

### Kayaking in the backwaters

First off, this is absolutely nothing like rigorous sea kayaking – it's a much easier and equally enjoyable cousin. Goa Kayaking operates kayaking tours on the backwaters and rivers of Goa, one of which is an almost-5km trip on the Sal backwaters, which is the easiest trip of the lot. You'll be blissfully paddling through scrub and very calm waters in a matter of seconds, even if you've never tried it before.

The buoyant kayaks are extremely sturdy and toppling over, while possible, isn't all that probable. In fact, I was assured that there have been only two such episodes in the last few

years. The kayaks respond to the slightest switch in direction, so you might find yourself temporarily stuck in the roots of the mangroves (it really does happen, as I found out) or wedged in the weeds, but it's just as easy to get out. Along the way, you'll spot a variety of cormorants, egrets and kingfishers, and, if you're very lucky, Indian sea eagles and pink-tailed ducks. By the end of the trip you'll have a wet bottom no matter how hard you try to stay dry and your sore arms will be miffed with you for a short while, but the three-odd hours you spent gliding down the meandering, calm backwaters are definitely it!

00-91-832-2541715; [goakayaking.com](http://goakayaking.com); meet for Sal



2

Backwaters trip near the Tata showroom on NH 17 in Nuvem; Office: No 6, Plot 721/ A, Airport Rd, Chicalim; 8.30am, 11am and 3.30pm; ₹ 3,050/ person, ₹ 4,800/ couple, ₹ 2,200/ person for groups of three and above, all costs include kayaks and paddles along with life jackets and snacks for the trip; advance reservation is a must

#### ALSO FOR:

⌚ **Gangs of girls:** It's definitely something to try with the girls (maximum of 12 people per trip).

⌚ **Couples:** Sure! They also offer a Full-Moon Kayaking trip on the Zuari River on five days a month (₹ 3,000/ person/ three hours).

⌚ **Families:** This is an easy-enough activity for kids, though the minimum age is eight years.

## 15 GREAT FOR A SPLASH

### Surfing off Arambol Beach

What an absolute, immeasurable pleasure it is, to be able to stay upright for all of 30 seconds, if that, on a surfboard! Yes, you're going to fall – a lot. Don't bother counting how many times, though, because that first time you manage to ride a wave to the shore with an iota of technique, you're probably going to feel like Indiana Jones in surf shorts.

The stretch of beach between Arambol and Mandrem is the perfect place for surfing virgins. The waves are just high enough to give you a thrill, *and* the actual practice you will most definitely need. And don't worry about your instructors: they are all ISA-certified surfing instructors. After a 30-minute training session on the sand, which includes practising paddling and posture along with instructions on techniques and warm-ups, it's time to head in for the real stuff. Never in your adult life will you have felt more like a wobbly toddler. Paddle, paddle, paddle – push-up for three counts – jump up on to your feet – SPLAT – drag your surfboard back into the sea and repeat. Somewhere along the 10th (or 20th) try, you're up, actually standing! Crouching really, and you're probably going to forget all those instructions and go splat again.

But that's okay – you did it once, you'll do it again and this time with some shreds of poise and skill.

Anton: 00-91-9623001810, Jono: 00-91-9011993147; [surfawa.com](http://surfawa.com), [surfawa@gmail.com](mailto:surfawa@gmail.com); meet at Surf Club, Arambol – Mandrem Beach, 9am onwards from Sept – May depending on weather conditions, closed in the monsoon; 90-minute Basic Surf Lesson: ₹ 2,000/ person with surfboard and rash-guard, check website for packages and courses; surfboard rental: ₹ 500/ hour, ₹ 1,500/ day

#### ALSO FOR:

👉 **Gangs of girls:** It's quite a thrill – go for it!

There are group discounts.

👉 **Couples:** Water babies will love it.

👉 **Families:** Minimum age is six years and kids tend to enjoy the sport. Knowing how to swim is essential.

## Ride those waves off Arambol Beach!

Facing pge:

1. Take a breather during the 15km cycling tour to enjoy the view
2. Delicious stuffed squid at Attulem Bittulem (see *Make it Happen*)

## 16 GREAT FOR A LAUGH AT YOURSELF

### Karaoke nights with Pilkie

It's an entertaining group that has gathered at Haveli in Candolim on a cool Thursday night; a little older than expected, but incredibly fun and really talented. I realise most of them are regulars at Pilkie's karaoke nights, and they really know how to let their hair down and have a good time.

Pilkie Mehta is herself one of the most jovial people you'll have the pleasure of meeting; her booming voice and infectious laugh are hard to resist. And she's always taking pictures. But you won't mind one bit, because chances are you'll be a little (who are we kidding! – probably very) sozzled, and just about ready to woo the world with your singing prowess. Trust me, don't underestimate the 'oldies', they are pros who'll be singing circles around you before you know it.

Held at different venues through the week, these nights are a great mix of fun, food and falling flat on your face (unless you're actually good, that is). So take a chance, grab that microphone and find out whether you'll be the one who gets a standing ovation or shocks the audience into an awkward silence. ↗

Pilkie Mehta: 00-91-9822139320; speak to her for where the party's at on your chosen night; 8pm onwards

#### ALSO FOR:

👉 **Gangs of girls:** Yup, go for it!

👉 **Couples:** Why not? Do a duet.

👉 **Families:** Not really.



## Essentials

### ► BEST TIME TO VISIT

Goa's tourist season begins post the monsoon and runs from October to April. A lot of activities and eateries are shut during the rainy months, so it's best to avoid that season. If you want to avoid the crowds (and inflated rates of the Christmas and New Year period) but still be a part of Goa's lively vibe, head there in September and October and February and March.

### ► GETTING THERE

Goa's Dabolim International Airport is very well connected to Indian cities. Air India, IndiGo, Jet Airways and SpiceJet fly direct from Mumbai (*return fares from ₹ 5,600*). Air India, SpiceJet, IndiGo, Jet Airways and Vistara fly direct from New Delhi (*return fares from ₹ 11,980*).

### ► GETTING AROUND

You can hire a scooter for about ₹ 150 to ₹ 300 a day depending on the season. We used the services of **Vaillankanni Auto Hires** (00-91-832-2489568, 00-91-9822101598; [goacars.in](http://goacars.in), [info@goacabs.com](mailto:info@goacabs.com); A-5, St Joseph Apts, Camotim Vaddo, Candolim; *AC Indica from ₹ 1,300/ eight hours/ 80km*).



## 4 WAYS TO DO GOA

	Girls	Families	Couples	Boys
<b>STAY</b>	Marie Christine Rebillot has done wonders with the restoration of <b>Quelleachy Gally</b> (1), a Colonial Indo-Portuguese home-turned-guesthouse that was built in 1843. Traditional furniture with a few quirky accents fill the enormous rooms and bathrooms that flank a pretty courtyard in the back (00-91-9822734950; <a href="http://goaluxuryhouseforrent.com">goaluxuryhouseforrent.com</a> , <a href="mailto:quelleachy.gally@yahoo.com">quelleachy.gally@yahoo.com</a> ; 511, Murrod Vaddo, Candolim; <i>from ₹ 3,000 [Oct and Mar 16–Apr]</i> ).	<b>Casa Praia</b> (2), with its beautifully-decorated, spacious rooms, large terraces and balconies, an inviting pool and incredibly relaxed vibe, is a great stay option for families. Located in the heart of Candolim, close to a variety of eateries and stores, this B&B is still secluded enough to enjoy the sounds of the ocean lulling you to sleep. The Family House is a traditional Portuguese home dating back to 1944. The Vista and Garden Studios have a colonial feel to them while the four smaller Annex studios open out to the garden and pool (00-91-9970444666; <a href="http://casapraia.goa.com">casapraia.goa.com</a> , <a href="mailto:mail@casapraia.goa.com">mail@casapraia.goa.com</a> ; H 477, behind Lemon Tree Hotel, Vaddy, Candolim, Bardez; <i>from ₹ 3,600 with breakfast</i> ).	<b>La Mangrove</b> (3) is all about quiet, chilled romance, a place to completely relax in. Located far away from all things Goa, accommodation here is in the form of teepees and the vibe is calm, understated and utterly romantic. While this eco-friendly place doesn't fit into that generic model of luxury (there are no ACs and the private dry loos aren't attached to the tent), what it does deliver on spectacularly is the luxurious experience of absolute privacy (00-91-832-2641243; <a href="http://lamangrovegoa.com">lamangrovegoa.com</a> , <a href="mailto:lamangrovegoa@gmail.com">lamangrovegoa@gmail.com</a> ; <i>close to Turtle Beach, Galgibag, South Goa; from ₹ 4,000 with breakfast</i> ).	With beach-y cottages with basic amenities a stone's throw from Mandrem-Arambol Beach, <b>GO-YM</b> (4) has that quintessential Goan vibe to it. It is located a minute's walk from Surf Club, which is the meeting point for surfing lessons, and is a 20-minute drive from Morjim Beach (00-91-8975154961; <a href="http://go-ymresort.com">go-ymresort.com</a> , <a href="mailto:sanjaybick@rediffmail.com">sanjaybick@rediffmail.com</a> ; <i>Bag-Dando, Kepkarwada, Arambol Beach, next to Surf Club, Arambol; from ₹ 1,500</i> ).
<b>EAT</b>	An ideal place to French it up, the food at <b>Le Poisson Rouge</b> (5) is termed 'creative Indo-French cuisine'. The Beetroot Carpaccio with Figs and Lemon Pickle topped with rucola leaves and Parmesan shavings is perfect to whet your appetite. Follow it up with the Duck Ravioli, served with spinach stir-fry, Goan pesto and kokum vinaigrette or a seafood risotto (00-91-832-3245800; <a href="http://lepoissonrouge-goa.info">lepoissonrouge-goa.info</a> ; <i>on Baga River, opposite Baga Bridge; 7pm–11pm; mains from ₹ 550</i> ).	<b>I95 Bar and Restaurant</b> (6) is all about relaxed fine-dining, great for the little ones to experiment with flavours while you get to experience good food under the stars. The beef carpaccio is absolutely excellent: superbly-thin slices of delicious beef with a herb marinade that perfectly complements the meat. Or, try the Lemon Rind-Dusted Seared Tiger Prawns served on a bed of creamy blue crab risotto (00-91-9881301184, 00-91-9823128567; <a href="http://i95goa.com">i95goa.com</a> ; <i>House No 1/9A, Grande Morod, Nagoa, Saligao, Bardez; 7pm–11pm Oct–Apr; mains from ₹ 450</i> ).	Ask Brazilian chef Guto Souza what to order at the utterly-romantic <b>Go With The Flow</b> (7) and he will recommend what can only be described as heaven-on-a-plate. <i>Escondidinho</i> is as difficult to pronounce as it is delicious. This Brazilian dish consists of dried shredded beef with pumpkin puree served with mascarpone and Grana Padano cheese. Another dish this place is famous for is the roasted pork belly served with apple puree, roasted cherry tomatoes and corn and bacon croquettes (00-91-750771556; <a href="http://gowiththeflowgoa.com">gowiththeflowgoa.com</a> ; <i>House 614, Arpora-Baga; 6pm–10.30pm; mains from ₹ 420</i> ).	With its waterfront location and incredibly tasty and equally inexpensive food, <b>Attulem Bittulem</b> (8) is a must-visit. The ambience screams basic but the food is excellent. If you're adventurous, try the salted beef tongue delicacy. If it's soul food you crave, the <i>samaryanchi koddi</i> is the way to go. This quintessentially-local dish consists of dried prawns in a thick coconut milk curry with dried mango skin and seed, had with steamed rice or <i>sannas</i> , a local fermented bread (00-91-9422441700; <i>Rua de Ourem, near Four Pillars, inside Panjim Community Centre, Mala; 12pm–3pm, 7pm–1am; mains from ₹ 99</i> ).

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# Soul music

Swashbuckling navigators, poet princes, great wine and better people – Portugal shows you how to take a sad song and make it better

WORDS DEEPTI UNNI





USK is gathering. Tiny clouds chase each other and scuttle across the face of the setting sun against the Rio Tejo, the Tagus River, which meets the Atlantic Ocean here, near Lisbon. As the sun disappears, the city begins to glow a soft gold, brilliant pinpoints of light marking the many localities scattered across the hills of the city. A lone voice – a woman's – is raised in a song of beauty and unbearable angst against the dying light of day. In the streets, grown men wipe their eyes and women sniffle into delicate handkerchiefs. This is allowed, nay, this is *de rigueur* – this is *fado*, the music of sorrow and loss, and the very soul of Portugal.

Looking around, you don't at first see the Portugal of the 600-year empire, whose legendary seafarers sailed winds and storms to bring back riches from parts unknown. Portugal today is a quiet, peaceful, sunny country where the standard of living is high, the crime rate low and where the Euro still stretches a lot further than it does even in neighbouring Spain. But look closer

## THIS IS FADO, THE MUSIC OF SORROW AND LOSS, AND THE VERY SOUL OF PORTUGAL

and you'll begin to see that the sea haunts Portugal in everything it does. It's in the exquisitely fresh seafood that's brought to your table every day, in gilt-dripping sconces and sculptures that line its monuments, in the names of heroes that spill from locals' lips – Vasco Da Gama, Prince Henry the Navigator, Afonso de Albuquerque, Ferdinand Magellan.

Da Gama, in particular, is *everywhere*. Here, he's not a *conquistador* but a bona fide hero, who dared to go where no white man had gone before. Most people I speak to seem to regard colonialism with a rose-tinted nostalgia, as a time of swashbuckling heroes and fairytale escapades. Perhaps it's the gentle nature of the Portuguese that casts the past in the light of the present – because they really are a wonderfully warm, gentle, hospitable people, full of bonhomie and curiosity about the world. Not in the mould of Da Gama then, who brought Portugal to India in 1498, in a series of skirmishes, bombardments and some terrifying acts of cruelty. Portuguese rule in India would endure for another 450 years, longer than even the British, when the Indian army forcibly evicted the last 3,000 troops stationed in Goa in 1961.

Interestingly, during Portugal's conquest of Goa, the king would send *Órfãos d'El-Rei* (orphans of the king) to the outpost, young girls of marriageable age whose keep had been entrusted to the sovereign. Intended as brides for ranking officers as well as the native aristocracy, this is also who Goa's Portuguese descendants trace their lineage to.

But Portugal today is a traveller's dream – think an untrammelled Spain at half the cost. The cities are vibrant, full of history and endlessly welcoming. Outside the main cities are miles of forests, secluded beaches, rolling vineyards and majestic hills where you could wander for days without meeting another soul. It's incredible then that Portugal's fallen off the tourist map while Spain and Italy have been welcoming ever more visitors every year. There are a million reasons to be here right now, not least the low cost of travel, accommodation and food within the country. There are isolated national parks to discover, cities to conquer, raucous festivals to throw yourself into, great (and cheap) wine and port to drink, plenty of *pastéis de nata* (egg-custard tarts) to gobble, and, of course, *fado*. →



1. Dancers in costume take to the streets in June, during the parade of the Feast of the Popular Saints

2. Alfama's colourful houses tumble into the sea from Castle Sao Jorge

3. The Algarve is famous for its hand-painted terracotta and ceramics

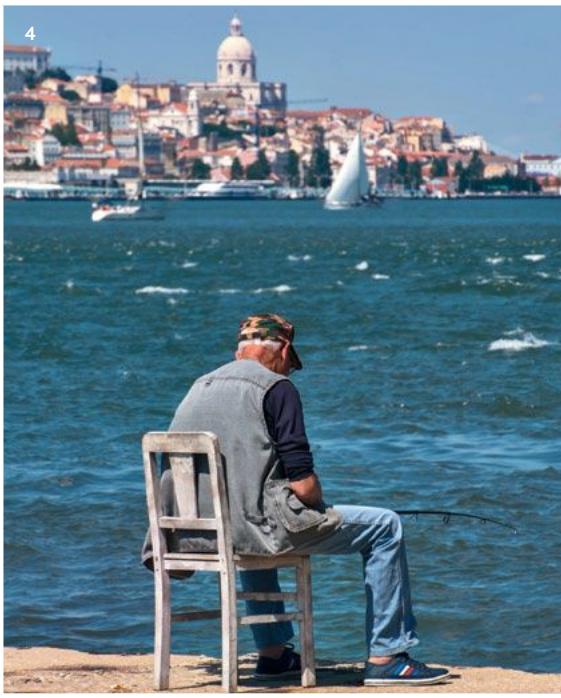
4. The River Tagus or Rio Tejo swarms with fish where it empties into the Atlantic near Lisbon

5. Many a ship has set sail on the blue waters of Lagos in the Algarve during Portugal's Age of Discoveries

6. Delicate blue *azulejos* (glazed ceramic tiles) lurk among the statues at the Palacio de Fronteira in Lisbon

Facing page: *Miradouros*, or viewpoints, scattered all over Lisbon offer breathtaking views of the city and the sea

Previous pages: Houses in the Ribeira District of Porto are covered in thousands of colourful glazed ceramic tiles





1. The Algarve has long been popular with British tourists for its accessibility and ridiculously low prices

2. Melancholy, loss and longing – *fado* is not for the easily depressed

3. Ler Devager is a former printing press finding its renaissance as a whimsical bookstore

4. Trams are possibly the best way to navigate the steep streets of Alfama, Lisbon

5. The Jerónimos Monastery in Belem, Lisbon, is an extravagant confection of azulejos and sea-themed friezes. It's also the final resting place of Vasco da Gama

6. Castelo São Jorge dates back to Moorish times

Facing page:

1. The Portuguese love their egg yolk, particularly in the form of *pastel de nata*, an egg-custard tart

2. Cabo de Roca is the western-most point of Europe. A long swim in a straight line would take you to the east coast of the United States

3. A bucolic idyll is always within easy reach no matter where you are in Portugal



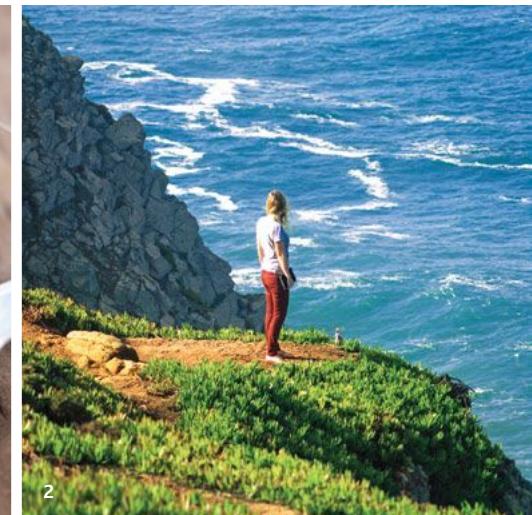
# Lisbon

**Fado** is the lifeblood of **Alfama**, the oldest quarter of Lisbon, whose narrow, cobbled streets are flanked by houses leaning drunkenly into each other, washing lines snapping and flapping above visitors' heads. Alfama begins at the foot of the **Castelo de São Jorge** ([castelodesaojorge.pt/en](http://castelodesaojorge.pt/en); *timings vary; ₹ 600*).

It's a massive Moorish castle crowning a hill – the first of many reminders of North Africa's conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. From here, the quarter spills into the ocean in a tumble of red roofs and whitewashed walls.

Getting lost is an intrinsic part of exploring Alfama. Huff and puff up the ridiculously-steep streets to discover staircases that go nowhere, passed by wizened old ladies effortlessly trotting up the lanes. Stumble across tiny squares covered in *azulejo* tiles and filled with gossiping locals and pop-up alfresco restaurants. Follow the voices of *fadistas* (*fado* singers) into streetside taverns bare of furniture but brimming with music. Bite into *bifanas*, succulent slices of pork simmered in broth and served in a floury, crusty bread, or the *chourico* in *pao*, a milder cousin of the Goan staple, often the only food served in a *fado* bar – sorrow is not compatible with a three-course meal.

The annual *Fado Festival* ([caixaalfama.pt/en/](http://caixaalfama.pt/en/)) held in early September, turns the whole block into a massive party. Performances happen all over the place – from the giant auditorium by the river to the most nondescript cafés. All of Portugal's *fado* stars are here then, and, despite its melancholic connotations, it's also a celebratory time. It is also when the annual **Urban Trail Lisboa** ([meourbantrail.pt](http://meourbantrail.pt)) is held, a footrace through the punishingly difficult streets of Alfama for which



competitors come from all over the country. Locals line the streets to cheer the participants on, and it's not unusual to see unwary visitors flattened against walls while runners thunder by with catcalling from the onlookers.

Wander down to the seaside, to charming, historic **Belém**, where the **Jerónimos Monastery** marks Vasco Da Gama's last resting place. Here, as with everywhere in Portugal, the sea finds its way into the architecture, and the monastery's Manueline ornamentation celebrates the country's maritime power, with fish, ropes, shells and seaweed motifs bringing the ocean to stone.

The other Lisbon, the young, noisy, party-friendly one, swings in the bohemian heart of **Bairro Alto** (old town). By day, the working-class quarter is home to backpacker hostels and Baroque churches, but come nightfall, the streets throng with bar-hopping teens and spring-breakers from the UK. The nearby **Chiado** neighbourhood is more sophisticated. Here, well-heeled young men and women shop at Hermès and Art Nouveau jewellery boutiques and take in a spot of theatre.

Hipster Lisbon – and it's a sight to be seen – lives by the docks in the reclaimed textile factories and warehouses of **Alcântara**. The **LX Factory**, once a textile manufacturing unit, is now occupied by design professionals, avant garde restaurants and music clubs (*Rua Rodrigues Faria, 103*).

There's the **Ler Devagar** bookstore, a printing press turned giant library, with titles in Portuguese, English, French and Spanish, whimsical sculptures and a little café (*Rua Rodrigues Faria, 103*). The graffiti-rich quarter is worth a wander along.

Or simply get away from the chaos of the city by escaping to **Cabo Da Roca** (40km), the western-most point of Europe, where a series of windswept granite cliffs are all that stand between Portugal and the United States. That, and about a million miles of the Atlantic Ocean.

The lesson, then, is that there is no one Lisbon. Each part of the city retains a distinctive character, one that's yet untouched by the spread of post-recession gentrification. But locals say all that is changing, and fast, so it might be a good time to catch Lisbon in its unguarded, gritty splendour before the wave of smartening up hits. →



# Sintra

A short drive from Lisbon (30km away), tucked snugly into lush green hills and down fern-covered paths, is the small town of Sintra. Less a town, more a chapter from a fairytale, the town's history dates back to the Celts, who considered it holy. When the Moors invaded Sintra, they thought it ideal for a vertiginous castle, and, when they were routed, it became a summer getaway for aristocrats. Today, that legacy lives in the many regal homes, gardens and castles that dot the hills. The stone rampart of the **Castelo de Mouros**, the Castle of the Moors, offers sweeping views of the town and, on clear days, of Lisbon, too ([parquesdesintra.pt](http://parquesdesintra.pt); ₹ 450 adult, ₹ 350 child). Once a functional fortification, the castle was rebuilt by the German king Ferdinand II, the royal consort of Queen Maria II of Portugal. As the queen's consort, Ferdinand was a ruler by name only, so he spent much of his time writing poetry, providing patronage to artists and reviving much of Portugal's architecture. Influenced by Romanticism, Ferdinand rebuilt the castle the way he imagined the Moors would, so it may be historically inaccurate, but is no less charming.

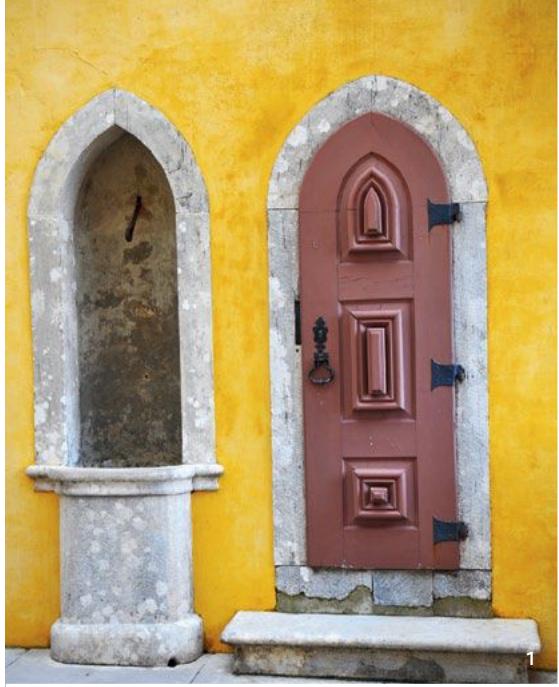
His undying love for all things romance is perhaps best epitomised in the **Pena National Palace**. At first glance,

it's a cross between a Lego fort and He-Man's Castle Grayskull, with a façade only a mother could love. But, the yellow-and-coral building with a mishmash of architectural styles, including Medieval arches, Islamic cupolas and neo-Gothic friezes, starts making sense when the guide tells me that King Ferdinand II was a nephew of King Ludwig of Bavaria, he of the many castles. Take a tour through the castle to see the royal dining rooms, the bedrooms with unusually short beds (back then, the royals would sleep sitting up, as lying down was the posture of the dead), and the magnificent sculpture of the newt, a water demon that brought together the elements of fire, water, earth, wind and sky in a metaphor for creation.

When the architecture begins to wear on the eyes, the castle's gardens beckon. Ferdinand II had plants and trees procured from exotic destinations to fill his garden, which is today home to 500 different species of trees, replete with birdsong and babbling brooks. It's a perfect fairytale to live for a day. →

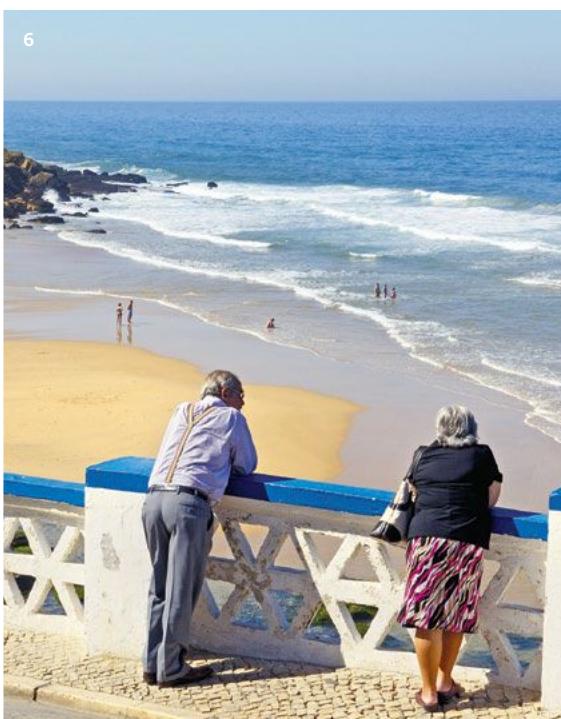
**AT FIRST GLANCE, IT'S A CROSS BETWEEN A LEGO CASTLE AND HE-MAN'S CASTLE GRAYSKULL**





1 & 2. Porto's riverside is a hodge-podge of colourful houses very like those of Fontainhas in Goa  
3. Street parades and medieval fairs are held in Vila Real in the Algarve in May on the Day of the City  
4. The stunning newt sculpture at the Pena National Palace  
5. If He-Man's Castle Grayskull had a baby with Lego blocks, it would probably look like the Pena National Palace  
6. Portugal's long coastline means plenty of clean, isolated beaches and warm Atlantic waters

Facing page: A Moorish stronghold reimagined by King Ferdinand II, Castelo dos Mouros crowns the hills of Sintra





1 & 3. Livraria Lello's Gothic façade hides a breathtaking Art Nouveau interior

2. Rolling vineyards line both sides of the River Douro in the heart of port wine country

4. Most of Porto's action happens on the banks of the River Douro in the Ribeira District

5. Barrels of port wine age slowly in the cellars of Vila Nova de Gaia

6. The Dom Luis Bridge is Porto's most striking architectural feature

Facing page:  
1. September is harvest time in the vineyards of Douro

2. Port and vinho verde – Portugal's two calling cards

# Porto

Perhaps it's the silky Rio Douro that winds sinuously through the heart of this little town that gives it that picture-postcard touch. Or maybe it's the shabby-chic appeal of its curiously run-down city centre, in contrast to the sophisticated wine caves across the river. Whatever it is, if the heaving cafés and squares are any indication, Porto's drawing visitors in droves.

The cultural importance of Porto lies, of course, in the port wine cellars that function out of nearby Vila Nova De Gaia. To understand Portugal's history of wine, though, necessitates a trip through the Douro wine-growing region. The third longest river in the Iberian Peninsula, the Rio Douro flows down from Castilla y León in Spain, bringing with it a microclimate that makes it especially conducive for port wine grapes. Terraced vineyards flank the river on both sides on its picturesque journey into Porto City, exploding in a stunningly beautiful panorama as it ripples and roils under the arching Dom Luis Bridge that spans it. Back in time, port wine would make its way in barrels on barges down the river, to be stored and matured in the cellars of Vila Nova De Gaia. It is from here that the river takes its name – the River of Gold – as the arterial waterway for Portugal's most celebrated export.

Gold is also the colour of the river by sunrise and sunset, when it lights up Porto's UNESCO-protected **Ribeira District** in a wash of amber. Boats tug at their moorings on the river, while children take turns noisily leaping

PHOTOGRAPHS: ©BON APPÉTIT/ALAMY (2), ©CEPHAS PICTURES LIBRARY/ALAMY (1), ©VILLORÉO/ALAMY (FACING PAGE 3), CORBIS (FACING PAGE 1, 5), GETTY IMAGES (FACING PAGE 2, 4, 6)

## TERRACED VINEYARDS FLANK THE RIVER, EXPLODING IN A BEAUTIFUL PANORAMA



into the water from its banks. The medieval fishing district on the city's waterfront is a jumble of brightly-coloured fishing houses, blue-tiled façades and opulent mansions. From the water, the buildings look like they've been stacked higgledy-piggledy on top of each other by a drunken architect – a Baroque church here, a palace there, a tumbledown Beaux-Arts customs house here. Closer to Porto's centre, once-majestic buildings take on a semi-shabby air. The 2008 recession and the Eurozone crises hit Porto particularly hard, and the signs still linger in the boarded-up townhouses and bank buildings that line its central avenues. It takes at least an hour's wander before the city's striking architectural marvels coalesce out of the vibrant jumble of the cityscape.

The **Dom Luis Bridge** is the first structure to catch the casual visitor's eye. Built tall to accommodate the Douro's hilly banks, it looks upon the lurid yellow, pink and blue houses that crowd the waterfront. Farther in the city, the imposing **Clérigos Church** peals the hours of the day while visitors crowd the belfry for bird's-eye views of the city (*Rua São Filipe Nery*). But maybe its most striking landmark is the **Livraria Lello**, perhaps the most beautiful Art Nouveau bookshop in the world (*Rua das Carmelitas*). A stained-glass ceiling throws rainbows over the shelves of books stacked all the way up to the ceiling, a twin staircase swoops and spirals across the centre of the library, and ornate balustrades float above →





1. Traditional *rabelo* cargo boats would transport barrels of port wine down to the cellars in Vila Nova de Gaia in the old days. Today, they're just for the tourists

2. The Festa do Chocalheiro is a curious pagan festival marking the winter solstice, celebrated in the north of Portugal

the heads of slack-jawed visitors. So popular is this library that it's open from 9am to 10am just so visitors can take photos – at all other times, silence, contemplation and a complete lack of cameras is encouraged.

But wine is Porto's *raison d'être* and a short stroll across the Dom Luis Bridge are the wine caves of **Vila Nova De Gaia**. All the cellars, particularly the majors – Sandeman, Taylor, Graham, Croft – offer tours and tastings, with films and museums to introduce first-timers to the wonders of the tawny fortified wine, along with a stop at the souvenir shop to pick up a bottle from the source. Learn how the wine was fortified with brandy so Portugal's legendary seafarers could carry it further and longer on their journeys. And when the port gets too cloying, plop down at one of the cafés by the river and ask for a *vinho verde* – this white, fizzy wine is fast becoming Portugal's other calling card. It's perfect paired with *chouriço assado*, a whole sausage grilled over a fire at your table: crispy on the outside, chewy on the inside, with little flavour-bombs of greasy fat and vinegar that explode in your mouth.

Portugal's seafaring legacy is represented in Porto by a somewhat politically incorrect museum, **World of Discoveries** ([worldofdiscoveries.com](http://worldofdiscoveries.com); ₹ 1,000). This interactive theme park is based on the adventures of everybody's favourite hero, Vasco Da Gama. It features actors dressed as the intrepid seafarer taking visitors on a tour through a reconstructed ship. You'll learn about the time the Zamorin of Calicut gifted Da Gama an Indian rhino instead of permission to establish a trading port. Da Gama actually carried the rhino back in his ship, where it was welcomed in Portugal to huge fanfare and some alarm (most people never having seen a rhino before), before it was gifted to the pope. There's also a boat ride that takes you through Portugal's colonies, including Brazil and India, where natives happily kow-tow to the invaders. It's curious, it's kitschy and, somehow, it's inherently Porto. →



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES (1, 2)

1



1. The lighthouse at Cabo de São Vicente marks the southwestern-most point of Europe  
2 & 3. The Algarve is full of hidden beaches squeezed between rocky promontories



2



3

## The Algarve

Since the 1960s, the Algarve's been a quick and dirty getaway for British tourists looking for a slice of the French Riviera without the cost or, well, the glamour. That's not to short-sell the south of Portugal. The Algarve is miles of bays scooped out of sandy cliffs, beaches you can still have to yourself, and blue, blue water as far as the eye can see.

The little town of **Sagres** in the Algarve is known for more than just its namesake beer. This was a pivotal point of Portugal's Age of Discoveries. It is on this rocky promontory of Cabo de São Vicente that Prince Henry the Navigator supposedly established the world's first-ever nautical school, the driving force behind Portugal's maritime power and the springboard for its colonial conquests. Today, all that's left of the legendary school is a bare-bones fortress and a commemorative plaque honouring his legacy.

The threads to history may have worn thin now,

but people still come here for the breathtaking views of sea-sculpted cliffs and white-horse stippled ocean. In summer, stray surfers prowl the beaches for the perfect wave, lovers entwine not-so-discreetly on the windblown cliffs past the safety barriers, and tiny fishing boats bob in the sheltered harbour – it's sun-dappled tranquillity at its best.

Portugal then, is more than just the sum of its parts. It's hard to explain. It's not just the stunning scenery, the incredibly hospitable people, the sights and sounds of hundreds of years of commingled history that washes over you every step of the way. It's actually when you put some distance between you and Portugal that it begins to tug gently at your heartstrings, when *saudade*, that indescribable feeling of nostalgia and longing, sweeps over you, when the notes of *fado* rise and soar in your head in their melancholy beauty... and you know you'll go back again. **LP**

**THE ALGARVE IS MILES OF BAYS SCOOPED OUT OF SANDY CLIFFS, BEACHES YOU CAN STILL HAVE TO YOURSELF**



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES (ALL)

# Make it Happen: Portugal

## Essentials

### BEST TIME TO VISIT

Portugal's Mediterranean climate means hot summers and mild winters and plenty of sun for most of the year. June to September is summer, when temperatures hover around 30° C. This is tourist season, when prices soar despite the weather often being too hot for outdoor activities. Spring (Mar–May) and late summer/ early autumn (Sept–Oct) are the best times to be here, when the crowds are thinner and the weather mild. The official swimming season is from around June to mid-September.

### GETTING THERE

We flew with Turkish Airlines. Emirates, Air France, Swiss Air, Lufthansa, Alitalia, British Airways and Jet Airways also fly to Lisbon from Mumbai and New Delhi, with a layover (return fares from ₹ 42,000).

### GETTING AROUND

Portugal is easy to get around in, by train, car and bus. Buses are quicker but the train routes are particularly scenic, especially along the coast and through the Douro wine region. A second-class ticket from Lisbon Santa Apolonia to Porto Campanha will cost you € 30 (₹ 2,150) and can be booked up to a month in advance at [cp.pt](http://cp.pt). We used the services of Mr Travel Portugal (00-351-213-550-161; [info@mrttravel.pt](mailto:info@mrttravel.pt); car hire from ₹ 3,500/ day).

### VISA

A Schengen short-stay visa to Portugal costs € 60 (₹ 4,835) and takes up to two weeks to process ([pt.vfsglobal.co.in](http://pt.vfsglobal.co.in)).

### EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Lisbon: [indembassy-lisbon.org](http://indembassy-lisbon.org)

### CURRENCY

€ 1 = ₹ 70.2

### FURTHER READING

Try Lonely Planet's *Portugal* guide and the official tourism website, [visitportugal.com](http://visitportugal.com).

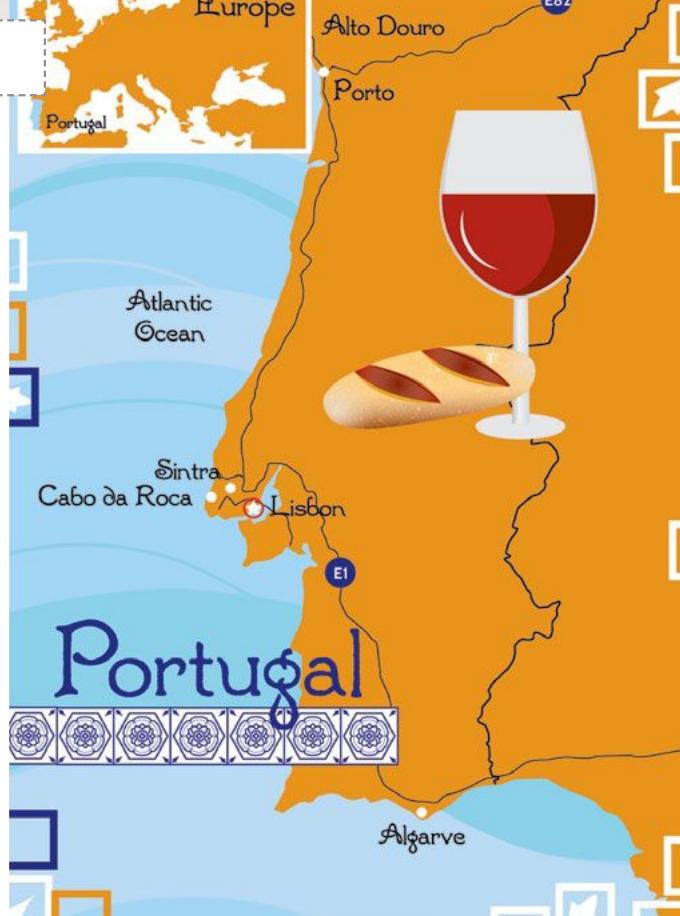
### FANCY A CURRY?

For a real taste of Goa, most locals in Lisbon head to the popular *Jesus é Goês* (Jesus is from Goa), helmed by chef Jesus Lee who is, indeed, from Goa. You'll find everything from *puri bhaji* to prawns *recheado* (00-351-211-545-812; *Rua de São José*, 23; mains from ₹ 800).

## SHOPPING

You'll find the lovely blue ceramic tiles that Portugal is famous for at every street corner, but, for the real deal, head to **Solar** in Lisbon's Príncipe Real area. This ceramic emporium sells tiles salvaged from churches and palaces, so you'll find everything from Moorish designs to Art Deco tiles, but be prepared to shell out a wad for it (00-351-213-465-522; 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat; *Rua Dom Pedro V*, 68/70, *Príncipe Real*; from ₹ 700 for small tiles). Wander through **Alcantara** to pick up design knick-knacks, from wall decals to bizarre sculptures ([lxfactory.com](http://lxfactory.com)).

You can't pass up the port wine in Porto, so head to **Vila Nova de Gaia** to pick up bottles, from the vintage to the freshly bottled, at the motherlode. Great local wines from the Douro and the Alentejo are available for as low as ₹ 3 (₹ 200) in supermarkets. Also get cork bags and sculptures from the cheery **Portosigns** ([portosigns.pt/wp](http://portosigns.pt/wp)) as well as ceramic sculptures and hand-crafted jewellery.



## STAY

**LISBON:** The **Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon** provides luxe accommodation in the heart of the city with great views over Lisbon's skyline. Plump for a room with breakfast; the spread is extravagant (00-351-213-811-400; [fourseasons.com/lisbon](http://fourseasons.com/lisbon); *Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca*, 88; from ₹ 27,400 with breakfast).

**PORTO:** A business hotel with easy access to most of the city's sights, the flashy **Porto Palacio Congress Hotel and Spa** offers Deluxe Room customers VIP access to its special lounge, which has a selection of 200 of the world's finest whiskies (00-351-226-086-600; [hotelpalacio.com](http://hotelpalacio.com); [reservas@portopalaciohotel.pt](mailto:reservas@portopalaciohotel.pt); *Ave Boavista*, 1269; from ₹ 9,850 with breakfast).

**SINTRA:** A former 14-century monastery and one-time summer retreat for Portuguese royals, the **Penha Longa Resort** is a sprawling, luxurious property with one of the best golf courses in continental Europe. It's also home to Sergi Arola's restaurant (*see Eat*), a close cousin of the one in Mumbai's JW Marriott (00-351-219-249-011; [penhalonga.com](http://penhalonga.com); [resort.penhalonga@penhalonga.com](mailto:resort.penhalonga@penhalonga.com); *Estrada da Lagoa Azul Sintra-Linhó*; from ₹ 10,700).

**THE ALGARVE:** The **Martinhal Beach Resort** is a unique property that combines luxury with childcare facilities to ensure that young parents and families with children can have a complete holiday. Exquisite food, sprawling beach villas and plenty of activities, including dolphin watching and watersports, are part of the daily schedule (00-351-282-240-200; [martinhal.com](http://martinhal.com); [res@martinhal.com](mailto:res@martinhal.com); *Quinta do Martinhal, Sagres*; from ₹ 11,750).

## VEG OUT

It can be hard to find vegetarian options here, but there's a happy proliferation of vegetarian and vegan restaurants in the centre of Lisbon. **Terra**, in the Príncipe Real quarter, serves an excellent

VFM veggie buffet with soups, starters, mains and dessert for lunch (00-351-213-421-407; [restauranteterra.pt](http://restauranteterra.pt); *Rua da Palmeira*, 15, *Príncipe Real*, *Lisbon*; 12.30pm–3.30pm, 7.30pm–12am Tues–Sun; buffet from ₹ 900).

## EAT

**LISBON:** One of Lisbon's most happening hot-spots, **Mini Bar Teatro** is part restaurant, part dinner theatre. Drawing from molecular gastronomy, the food is fun and playful – little caipirinha balls that explode in your mouth, and beef tartare in mini ice-cream cones – and the staff is happy to help you navigate the tricky menu (00-351-211-305-393; [joseaveillez.pt/en/mini-bar](http://joseaveillez.pt/en/mini-bar); *Rua António Maria Cardoso*, 58; 7pm–1am; tasting menu: ₹ 2,450).

**PORTO & THE DOURO:** A must-stop in the Douro wine region, **Restaurante D.O.C** serves local produce in all sorts of spectacular ways paired with exquisite wines. The location, on a pier on the Douro looking at sun-dappled wine terraces, is a bonus (00-351-254-858-123; [ruipaula.com](http://ruipaula.com); *Estrada Nacional*, 222, *Folgosa, Armamar*; 12.30pm–3.30pm, 7.30pm–11pm; mains from ₹ 2,500).

**SINTRA:** **Arola** at the Penha Longa Resort serves modern Mediterranean cuisine with deep Spanish influences. Tuck into tapas like *patatas bravas*, Iberian pork and suckling pig, all washed down with a fine selection of wines from the Douro and Alentejo (00-351-219-249-094; [penhalonga.com](http://penhalonga.com); 7am–10pm Sun–Thur, 7am–11.30pm Fri–Sat; tapas from ₹ 560).

**THE ALGARVE:** Chef Rui Pina of **As Dunas** at the Martinhal heads out to the fish market early every morning for the freshest local catch, and the menu at this seafood restaurant varies accordingly. There's also a kids-special menu for the little ones, who might not fancy pickled octopus (00-351-282-240-200; [martinhal.com](http://martinhal.com); mains from ₹ 1,025).

## GOOD TO KNOW

- One of the best ways to see Lisbon is via the hop-on hop-off Electrico No 28 vintage tram that goes through Lisbon's most picturesque districts.
- A one-day **Carris/Metro**

**travel card** allows access to Lisbon's trams, buses and funiculars ([metrolisboa.pt/eng](http://metrolisboa.pt/eng); ₹ 425). The **Lisboa card** grants free travel on the city's transport and museum access ([visitlisboa.com](http://visitlisboa.com); from ₹ 1,300/ day).



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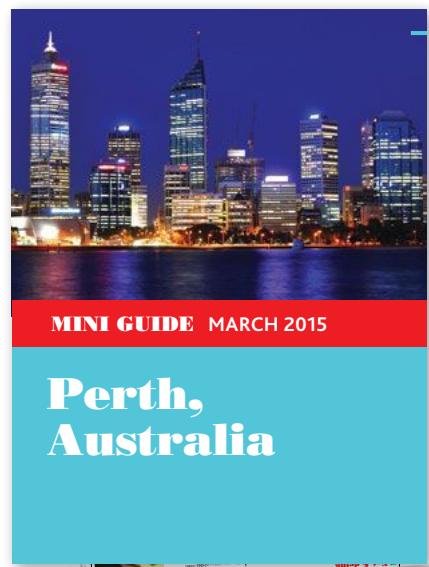
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Fold 2

With an illustrious history that is said to have had a great impact on modern Malaysia, the UNESCO World Heritage City of Melaka is fascinating

## MINI GUIDE MARCH 2015

# Melaka, Malaysia

### See

#### BEST FOR CULTURE ①

Start your heritage walk at the Dutch-style **Christ Church** built in 1753 (free) and the nearby **Stadthuys**, built between 1641 and 1660. A fantastic example of Colonial Dutch architecture, it houses the **Museum of History and Ethnography** (9am–5.30pm; from ₹85 adult, ₹35 child).

Head next to the 16th-century **St Paul's Church** atop St Paul's Hill that affords great views over the surrounds (free). After a stop at the ruins of the **A'Famosa Fort**, a fortress built by the Portuguese in 1511 (free), visit the **Malacca Sultanate Palace**, a beautiful replica of the earlier 15th-century palace of Sultan Mansur Shah, which houses the **Cultural Museum** (Jalan Kota, St Paul's Hill; 9am–5.30pm Wed–Mon; ₹35).

#### BEST FOR VIEWS ②

Head to **Menara Taming Sari** for a bird's eye view over Melaka. At 80m, this revolving tower offers incredible panoramic vistas. Go early; the lines can get long (00-60-6-288-1100; ₹170 child for a one-hour tour).



The Protestant Christ Church is built in the Dutch style

[menaratamingsari.com](http://menaratamingsari.com); Jalan Merdeka Bandar Hilir; 10am–10pm; ₹340 adult, ₹170 child for a seven-minute ride up.

#### BEST FOR HISTORY ③

A set of three well-restored traditional townhouses, the **Baba & Nyonya House Museum** is a great way to gain insight into 19th-century Baba-Nyonya culture and history in Melaka (00-60-6-283-1273; [babanyonyamuseum.com](http://babanyonyamuseum.com); 48 & 50, Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock; 10am–11.45am & 2pm–4pm; ₹250 adult, ₹170 child for a one-hour tour).

### WHY GO?

For the food, history, culture and architecture...

### WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Best explored on foot, the city has some incredible Dutch, Malay, Colonial and Chinese architecture to gawk at, as well as heritage sites and museums to explore. Add to that the mouth-watering cuisines from different cultures, and you'll find yourself with an interesting smorgasbord up for discovery.



Left: Old houses along Melaka River

Right: Look for the distinctive trishaws in Malacca

### Do

#### BEST FOR RELAXATION ④

A cruise tour on the **Melaka River** lasts from 45 minutes to an hour and you'll pass traditional villages, Malay townhouses and pretty scenery. Choose an evening or night tour (00-60-6-281-4322; [melakarivercruise.com](http://melakarivercruise.com); town departure point: Jalan Laksamana, next to Maritime Museum; Spice Garden departure point: Jalan Tun Mutahir; 9am–11.30pm; ₹250 adult, ₹120 child).



A cruise down Melaka River can be a relaxing way to discover the city

#### BEST FOR ATMOSPHERE ⑤

Soak in the feel of Melaka's varied cultures by wandering down **Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock**, or Heeren Street, lined with traditional shop houses like 8 Heeren Street, a beautifully-restored 18th-century building (11am–4pm Tues–Sat; free); **Jalan Hang Jebat**, or Jonker Street, full of antique stores, art galleries and incredible street food; and **Jalan Tokong**, where Cheng Hoon Teng, the oldest Chinese temple in Malaysia, is located (7am–7pm).

#### BEST FOR NATURE ⑥

The **Butterfly and Reptile Sanctuary** has exotic insects, crocs, butterflies, snakes, lizards and pretty koi fish (00-60-6-232-0033; [butterflyreptile.com](http://butterflyreptile.com); Ayer Keroh; 8.30am–5.30pm; ₹300 adult, ₹200 child). Nearby is the **Melaka Zoo & Night Safari**, home to around 200 animal species, some endangered. Don't miss the night safari (00-60-6-2324-053; [melakazoo.com](http://melakazoo.com); Jalan Hang Tuah Jaya, Ayer Keroh; ₹400 adult, ₹300 child).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

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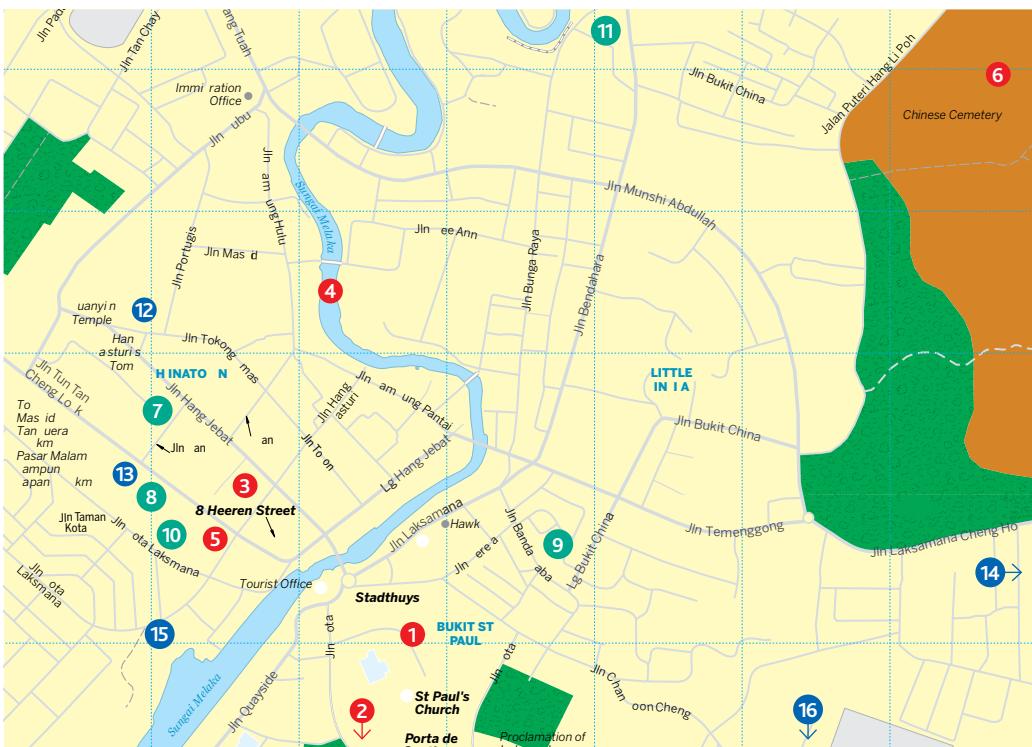
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# MINI GUIDE

## Melaka, Malaysia

### Getting around



See Eat & drink Sleep

### Essentials

#### GETTING THERE

SriLankan Airlines, Malaysian Airlines, Jet Airways, Thai Airways, Singapore Airlines and Japan Airlines fly to Kuala Lumpur from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹19,200). Melaka (137km from KL International Airport) can be reached via the North-South Expressway.

#### THE COST



#### DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



#### WHEN TO GO

Its tropical climate means Melaka is hot and humid throughout the year, with temperatures ranging from 21°C to 35°C. Rainfall occurs year round, with September to November being the wettest months.

### Eat

Try some home-cooked Nyonya cuisine at the quaint (and very popular) **Nancy's Kitchen** 7, which is usually packed to the rafters. Expect long queues of hungry people (7, Jalan Hang Lekir, off Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock; 11.30am – 5.30pm Mon – Thur, till 9.30pm Fri – Sun).

**The Baboon House** 8 serves up American and fusion-style burgers in eclectic surroundings. Choose from the likes of the Baboon Beef Burger and the Oriental Chicken Burger. Try the excellent coffee (00-60-6-2831-635; 89, Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock; 10am – 5pm Mon & Wed – Fri, 10am – 7pm Sat – Sun, closed Tues).

**Capitol Satay** 9 has been a local favorever for its satay celup, a steamboat satay where skewers of raw or semi-cooked meat and veggies are dunked into hot spicy peanut sauce at the table (00-60-6-283-5508; 41, Lorong Bukit Cina; 5pm – 11pm Wed – Mon).

**FANCY A CURRY?** If you're craving succulent tandoori dishes with buttery naan, head to **Pak Putra Restaurant** 10. Don't judge this



Make the time to try traditional Malay food

eatery by its façade; the tandoori chicken is yummy (00-60-126015876; Jalan Laksamana 4; 6pm – 2am Tues – Sun).

**VEG OUT** Serving a mix of Malay, Chinese, Western and vegan dishes, **Veggie Planet** 11 focuses on healthy and organic ingredients (00-60-6-292-2819; veggieplanet.my; 41-43, Jalan Melaka Raya 8, Taman Melaka Raya; 9am – 10pm).

### Visa

A tourist visa for Malaysia takes five days to process (vfsglobal.com; ₹1,000 + ₹335 VFS service charge).

### Sleep

Set in a stylish Art-Deco heritage building, **Jonker Boutique Hotel** 12 is located right on busy Jonker Street (00-60-6-282-5151; jonkerboutiquehotel.com; 82 – 86, A&B, Jalan Tokong; from ₹4,900).

Inspired by Peranakan culture, the boutique **Courtyard @ Heeren** 13, sited in Chinatown, boasts 15 beautiful rooms (00-60-6-281-0088; courtyardatheeren.com; 91, Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock; from ₹3,400).

Located a short drive from Melaka's historic attractions, **The Settlement Hotel**

**Melaka** 14 is a delightful boutique hotel (00-60-6-292-1133; thesettlementhotel.com; No 63, Jalan Ujong Pasir; from ₹4,400 with breakfast).

Located on the banks of the Melaka River, the luxurious

**Casa del Rio, Melaka** 15 has a spa, an infinity pool and 66 magnificently-decorated and spacious rooms (00-60-6-289-6888; casadelrio-melaka.com; 88, Jalan Kota Laksamana; from ₹7,200 with breakfast).



A tribute to the father of Malay bodybuilders on Jonker Street

Built around a 1920s mansion, **The Majestic Malacca** 16 is a plush mix of Colonial style and ultra modernity. The 54 stylish rooms and suites echo the architectural design of the old mansion (00-60-6-289-8000, 00-60-3-2783-1000; majesticmalacca.com, travelcentre@ytlhotels.com.my; 188, Jalan Bunga Raya; from ₹7,500 with breakfast).

### Embassy Alert

High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur: indianhighcommission.com.my

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

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## MINI GUIDE MARCH 2015

# Family fun in Paris, France

### See

#### LES CATACOMBES ①

Secret tunnels and passages zig-zag beneath Paris's bustling streets, cocooning the 2km-long catacombs, lined with skulls and bones, the remains of over six million Parisians. The fantastically-creepy 45-minute tour of what may be the world's largest graveyard takes you back in time (00-33-1-4322-4763; [catacombes.paris.fr](http://catacombes.paris.fr); 1, Avenue du Colonel Henri Rol-Tanguy; 10am–8pm Tues–Sun, check website for English tour timings; from ₹700 adult, child free).

#### LE MUR DES JE T'AIME ②

When walking around Montmartre, stop at this mural that says those three special words (I love you) in 250 languages! A project initiated by artists Frédéric Baron and Claire Kito, it's a heartwarming pit-stop for families and great for cheesy photographs, so cuddle up and smile ([lesjetaime.com](http://lesjetaime.com); *Butte Montmartre, Place des Abbesses, Square Jehan Rictus*; check website for timings; free).



The sprawling Musée d'Orsay is effortlessly grand

#### MUSÉE D'ORSAY ③

Set in what was once the Gare d'Orsay railway station, this stroller-friendly museum loves kids, with guided tours and a bookshop just for them. Sunlight streams into the three-storey building through the skylight and illuminates the French artworks on display, all created between 1848 and 1914 (00-33-1-4049-4814; [musee-orsay.fr](http://musee-orsay.fr); 1, Rue de la Légion d'Honneur; 9.30am–6pm Tues–Sun, till 9.45 Thur [check online calendar of events]; from ₹800 adult, child free, tour for child [5 to 10 years]: ₹320).

The French capital is the oldest city in the book when it comes to romance, but scrape the surface and it can be *trés magnifique* for families, too.

Traipse about gardens, climb the Eiffel Tower; if all fails, there's always Disneyland

### WHY GO?

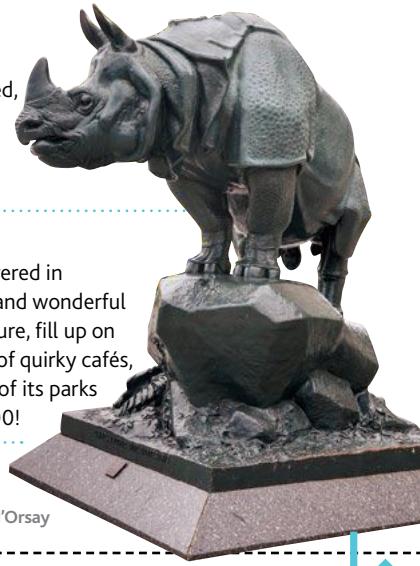
Paris is so much more than just a romantic getaway. There's family-friendly fun to be enjoyed, and culture and ambience far beyond the iconic amusement park the city is famous for.

### WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Every square inch of Paris is covered in history and art; discover weird and wonderful museums, interesting architecture, fill up on crêpes and croissants in scores of quirky cafés, and take a stroll in at least one of its parks and gardens – there are over 400!

Left: The Eiffel Tower is an iconic symbol of Paree

Right: A rhino sculpture at the Musée d'Orsay



### Do

#### LUXEMBOURG GARDENS ④

Fancy a ride with the family on the city's oldest merry-go-round? The picturesque Luxembourg Gardens are ideal for kids to have some old-school, technology-free fun. Once they tire of the swings and slides, take in the entertaining puppet shows and bee-keeping at the apiary, rent a toy sailboat and walk through the orchards (00-33-1-4264-3399; Rue de Médicis – Rue de Vaugirard; 8.15am – 4.30pm [though may stay open longer till 9.30pm]; free).



Disneyland Paris never fails to deliver childhood memories

#### DISNEYLAND PARIS ⑥

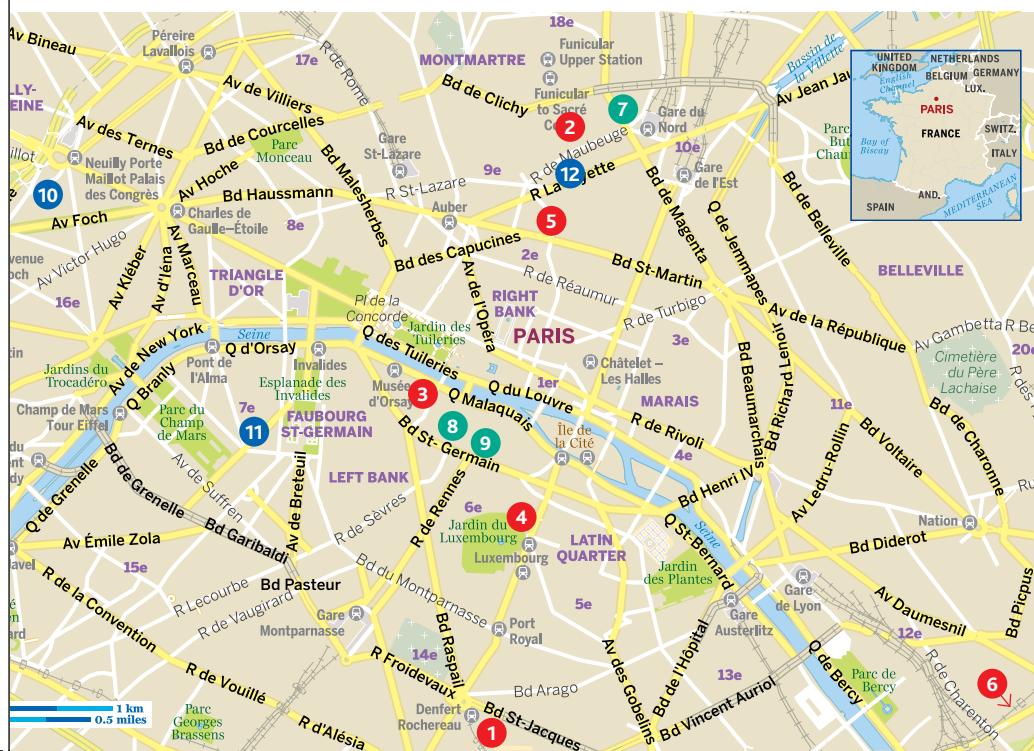
This one's for kids of all ages (read: adults, too). Barely an hour out (44km) of the capital, Disneyland Paris comes crammed with your favourite Disney characters and incredible rides and makes for a day of absolute fun – and exhaustion ([disneylandparis.co.uk](http://disneylandparis.co.uk); *Marne-la-Vallée*; check website for timings; day pass: ₹6,000 adult, ₹5,555 child).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

## MINI GUIDE

### Family fun in Paris, France

#### Getting around



#### Eat & drink

One tiny cup of thick, rich, velvety hot chocolate isn't enough for anyone; and at **Coquelicot** 7, it needn't be! Situated in Montmartre, this cute little café serves the delicious drink in a large bowl – the French way of drinking hot chocolate – because sometimes, good things don't just come in small packages (00-33-1-4606-1877; 24, Rue des Abbesses, [coquelicot-montmartre.com](http://coquelicot-montmartre.com); 8am – 5.30pm Tues – Fri, till 6.30pm Sat – Sun; breakfast from ₹350).

Meat-loving families, rejoice! The iconic **Le Relais de l'Entrecôte** 8 serves one meal only – steak and frites with the house sauce – but with such consistent perfection that it is regarded as one of the best of its kind in the world (00-33-1-4633-8282; [relaisentrecote.fr](http://relaisentrecote.fr); 101, Boulevard du Montparnasse, Saint-Germain-des-Pres [check website for other outlets]; 12pm – 2.30pm, 7pm – 11.30pm; set meal from ₹1,800).

Visit **Little Breizh** 9 to indulge in that French classic – the crêpe. It's tiny; get there early (00-33-



Make sure you sink your teeth into crêpes while in Paris

#### Visa

Apply for a short-stay Schengen visa valid for tourism and business (₹ 4,200); as of January 1, 2015, Indian tourists will be issued visas within 48 hours of application ([ambafrance-in.org](http://ambafrance-in.org)).

#### Embassy Alert

Embassy of India, Paris: [ambinde.fr](http://ambinde.fr)

See Eat & drink Sleep

#### Essentials

##### GETTING THERE

Jet Airways, Qatar Airways, Emirates, Air France, Etihad Airways, and Air India fly to Paris's Charles De Gaulle Airport from major Indian cities (return fares from ₹33,500).

##### THE COST



##### DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



##### WHEN TO GO

Take advantage of the glorious European summer and visit anytime between June and September, although this is also peak tourist season for the city. Winters are cold and wet, not ideal for frolicking around outdoors.

#### Sleep

Surprisingly affordable, **Hotel Residence Foch** 10 is a pastel haven located a short drive from the Eiffel Tower and other Parisian attractions. The family suite is a spacious and sensible bet for your stay in the city (00-33-1-4500-4650; [foch-paris-hotel.com](http://foch-paris-hotel.com); 10, Rue Marbeau; from ₹8,725, family suite from ₹17,800).

Easy on the pocket by Parisian standards and a stone's throw from the Eiffel Tower, the charming **Hotel du Champ de Mars** 11 with cosy rooms in warm French colours is a traveller's favourite (00-33-1-4551-5230; [hotelduchampdemars.com](http://hotelduchampdemars.com); 7, Rue du Champ de Mars; from ₹11,200).

Perfectly Paris is an apartment rental website with options to suit different budgets and family sizes. From the site, two-bedroomed **La Belle Epoque** 12 is a 10-minute walk from Gare du Nord station, and perfect for families of four or more (00-33-1-4492-0084; [perfectlyparis.com](http://perfectlyparis.com); [gail@perfectlyparis.com](mailto:gail@perfectlyparis.com); Rue Rochambeau; from ₹18,850/night for a minimum of three nights).



Kashmir House is where you go for your tandoori fix in Paris

#### Fancy a Curry?

**Kashmir House** gets rave reviews for its authentic food and attentive staff. Try the tandoori chicken or mutton biryani (00-33-1-4022-0089; [kashmirhouseparis.com](http://kashmirhouseparis.com); 36, Rue de Chabrol; 12pm – 1.30pm, 7pm – 11pm; mains from ₹500).

#### Veg Out

The all-organic **Café Pinson** is famed for its menus and cosy ambience (00-33-9-8382-5353; [cafepinson.fr](http://cafepinson.fr); 69, Rue du Forez (3rd Arrondissement), from ₹800).

For more details, log on to [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com)

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Languid, lovely and eminently liveable, Western Australia's capital offers both small-city charm and big-city convenience

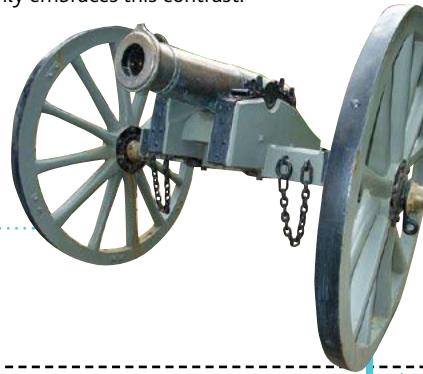
### WHY GO?

Perth may not have a reputation for high-jinks like Sydney and Melbourne, but it makes up for it in wide-open spaces and incredibly friendly people. North of the city, the landscape twists itself into fantastic shapes and, in the south, turquoise waters off pristine beaches sprawl for miles with only the gulls for company. Whether it's solitude you're craving or a busy night out on the town, it's all within arm's reach in Perth.

### WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

You'll find bushland in the heart of the city and untamed wilderness just outside, but Perth and its surrounds have a cosmopolitan vibe that happily embraces this contrast.

And you don't have to go far to find the party – from Northbridge's clubs to Fremantle's Cappuccino Strip, there's enough happening here to rival the buzz of the east coast.



Left: Perth's skyline sparkles across the Swan River

Right: Antique cannons stand guard in sprawling Kings Park

## MINI GUIDE MARCH 2015

# Perth, Australia

### See & Do

#### BEST FOR RAMBLING ①

You could easily spend a day in **Kings Park and Botanic Garden**, home to miles of green walks, lookout points offering sweeping views of the city and even protected bushland (00-61-8-9480-3600; [bgpa.wa.gov.au](http://bgpa.wa.gov.au); free).



Fremantle's Cappuccino Strip is lined with cafés and restaurants

#### BEST FOR ARCHITECTURE ②

See (and hear) the 12 sonorous bells of St Martin-in-the-Fields, one of the most famous churches in Trafalgar Square in London, at the idiosyncratic **Swan Bell Tower** (00-61-862-100-444; [thebelltower.com.au](http://thebelltower.com.au); Barrack Square, Riverside Dr; 10am – 3.45pm; ₹745 adult, ₹475 child).

#### BEST FOR DAY-TRIPS ③

Just 30 minutes from Perth, **Fremantle** is filled with sprightly cafés and boisterous bars. Take a coffee break on the Cappuccino Strip, then hop across to Fremantle Prison (00-61-893-369-200; [fremantleprison.com.au](http://fremantleprison.com.au); 1, The Terrace; 9am – 5pm; tours from ₹1,100) for a few thrills and chills ([visitfremantle.com.au](http://visitfremantle.com.au)).

#### BEST FOR GOLD ④

Head to the **Perth Mint** to see the process of smelting and refining gold, and even watch a gold pour (00-61-894-217-223; [perthmint.com.au](http://perthmint.com.au); 310, Hay St, East Perth; 9am – 5pm; ₹1,010).

#### BEST FOR CRICKET ⑤

Tour the legendary **Western Australia Cricket Association** ground, then stop at the museum and gawk at important cricket memorabilia (00-61-8-9265-7318; [waca.com.au](http://waca.com.au); Nelson Crescent, East Perth; check website for timings; tours and museum from ₹800).

### Sleep

Housed in an Art-Deco building, **Perth City YHA's ⑥ backpacker** vibe is tempered by the crowds of mine workers flying in and out of the neighbouring oilfields, and its location, close to the train station, is superb (00-61-892-873-333; [yha.com.au](http://yha.com.au); 300, Wellington St; rooms with private bathrooms from ₹5,900).

Centrally-located **Comfort Hotel Perth ⑦** does clean, affordable accommodation. The rooms are neat and the service is great (00-61-892-207-000; [comforthotelperthcity.com.au](http://comforthotelperthcity.com.au); 200, Hay St; from ₹7,645 with breakfast). The lovely rooms at **Frazer Suites ⑧** come with a high price tag, but the sweeping views of the Swan River from your window and the striking interiors may be worth it (00-61-8-92-610-000; [perth.frasershospitality.com](http://perth.frasershospitality.com); 10, Adelaide Terrace, East Perth; from ₹9,275).

The odd but charming **Miss Maud Swedish Hotel ⑨** is an institution in Perth with minimalistic rooms that clash with the old-



Perth's suburbs offer cheaper accommodation than the city centre

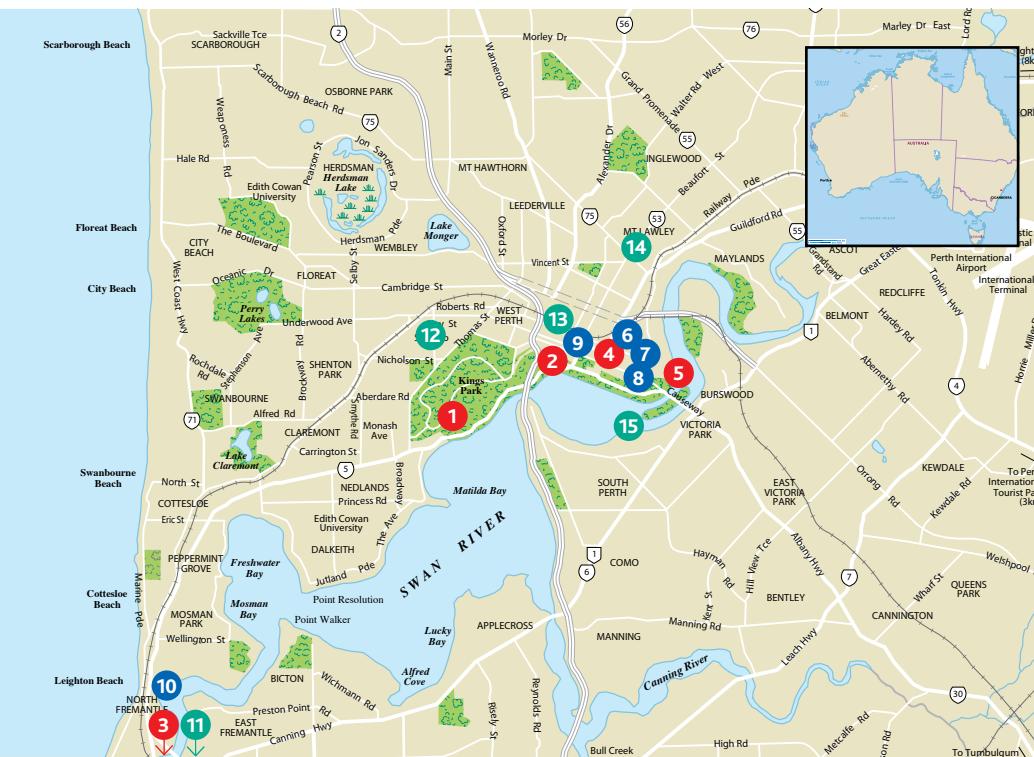
school decor. Plump for breakfast here; they do a lavish smorgasboard that should hold you up right till dinner (00-61-893-253-900; [missmaudhotel.com.au](http://missmaudhotel.com.au); 97, Murray St; from ₹9,965 with breakfast).

If you're planning an overnighter in Fremantle, **Pier 21 Apartment Hotel ⑩** is right in the middle of all the action. The rooms are characterless but you're paying for the location (00-61-8-93-362-555; [pier21.com.au](http://pier21.com.au); 7 – 9, John St, North Fremantle; from ₹12,655).

## MINI GUIDE

### Perth, Australia

#### Getting around



#### Eat & drink

No trip to Fremantle is complete without a stop at **Little Creatures Brewing** 11, a cavernous brewery and pub that does some of WA's most spectacular beer. The pale ale, in particular, is award winning and the food is lip-smackingly good (00-61-862-151-000; [littlecreatures.com.au](http://littlecreatures.com.au); 40, Mews Rd, Fremantle; check website for timings; a pint of beer from ₹ 300).

For all things patisserie, **Chez Jean-Claude** 12 is your best bet. Take away quiches and pastries from this Swiss-heritage deli or have them whip you up a sandwich with freshly-baked bread (00-61-893-817-968; [chezjeanclaudepatisserie.com.au](http://chezjeanclaudepatisserie.com.au); 333, Rokeby Rd, Subiaco; 6am – 6pm Mon – Fri; sandwiches from ₹ 400).

Tapas-style food is the order of the day at **Greenhouse** 13. The Med-influenced menu is prepared with the best local produce, and the spiced lamb with pomegranate and pistachio comes highly recommended (00-61-8-9481-8333; [greenhouseperth.com](http://greenhouseperth.com); 100, St Georges Terrace; 7am till late



A lot of Perth restaurants focus on locally-sourced seasonal produce

Mon – Fri, from 9am Sat; tapas from ₹ 500).

**Cantina 663**'s 14 menu varies according to the season, but expect fresh seafood and pasta that draw inspiration from the Mediterranean (00-61-893-704-883; [cantina663.com](http://cantina663.com); 663, Beaufort St, Mount Lawley; mains from ₹ 700).

Rugged Australian cuisine meets French sophistication at **Friends Restaurant** 15. Carnivores will love the stuffed kangaroo loin and Wagyu steak (00-61-892-210-885; [friendsrestaurant.com.au](http://friendsrestaurant.com.au); Fortescue Centre, 20, Terrace Rd; check website for timings; mains from ₹ 2,300).

See Eat & drink Sleep

#### Essentials

##### GETTING THERE

Malaysia Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Jet Airways and Emirates Airline fly to Perth from Mumbai and New Delhi with one stopover (return fares from ₹ 42,000).

##### THE COST



##### DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



##### WHEN TO GO

Winters (June – August) are cold and rainy, but the warmer months (Sept through Mar) are milder, with clear skies and flowers in bloom. Western Australia's capital also gets much livelier and louder when the Fringe Festival kicks in around January – February ([fringeworld.com.au](http://fringeworld.com.au)), and the Perth Festival in February ([perthfestival.com.au](http://perthfestival.com.au)).

#### Fancy a Curry?

**Chutney Mary** prides itself on the freshly-ground spices used in its cooking. You'll find everything from *dal makhni* and chicken 65 to *saag aloo* on the menu here, but get the full *thali* that's tremendously VFM (00-61-893-812-099; [chutneymarys.com.au](http://chutneymarys.com.au); 67, Rokeby Rd, Subiaco; 12pm – 2.30pm and 5.30pm – 10.15pm; mains from ₹ 765).



There are plenty of vegetarian food options in the city

#### Veg out

The **Raw Kitchen** is part lifestyle store, part vegan restaurant, with a menu that's full of innovative plant-based food and drinks. The airy and bright 1920s warehouse décor makes it a great place at which to spend a Sunday afternoon slurping smoothies and digging into green polenta and kale chips (00-61-894-334-647; [therawkitchen.com.au](http://therawkitchen.com.au); 181A, High St, Fremantle; 11am – 4pm Mon – Thur, 11am – 9pm Fri – Sun; mains from ₹ 790).

#### Visa

You can apply for a short-term tourist visa through [vfs-au-in.com](http://vfs-au-in.com). The fees start from ₹ 7,700 with an additional VFS charge of ₹ 910. The visa takes at least 15 working days to process ([india.embassy.gov.au](http://india.embassy.gov.au)).

#### Embassy Alert

Consulate General of India, Perth: [cgiperth.org](http://cgiperth.org)

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